CONFERENCES ON THE INTERIOR LIFE

SKELLY

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BY

THE REV. A. M. SKELLY, O.P.

VOLUME II

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CONTENTS

THE ILLUMINATIVE WAY (*Continued*)

First Part—Vocal Prayer

PAGE

FIRST CONFERENCE. Prayer 1

SECOND CONFERENCE. The First Condition of Prayer 12

THIRD CONFERENCE. The Last Four Conditions of Prayer 18

FOURTH CONFERENCE. The "Our Father,"—The Address 26

FIFTH CONFERENCE. The First Petition of the "Our Father" 37

SIXTH CONFERENCE. The Second and Third Petitions 45

SEVENTH CONFERENCE. The Fourth and Fifth Petitions 54

EIGHTH CONFERENCE. The Sixth and Seventh Petitions 63

NINTH CONFERENCE. The Rosary—The Vocal Element 72

TENTH CONFERENCE. The Joyful, the Sorrowful, and the Glorious Mysteries 80

ELEVENTH CONFERENCE. The Excellence of the Rosary Shown from Various Considerations . 87

3707

PAGE

TWELFTH CONFERENCE. The Divine Office. (I) . 93

THIRTEENTH CONFERENCE. The Divine Office. (II) 100

Second Part—Mental Prayer

FIRST CONFERENCE. Mental Prayer 108

SECOND CONFERENCE. Difficulties in the Practice of Mental Prayer 117

THIRD CONFERENCE. Informal Meditation . . . 124

FOURTH CONFERENCE. Affective Prayer. (I) . . 135

FIFTH CONFERENCE. Affective Prayer. (II) . . 143

SIXTH CONFERENCE. The Prayer of Recollection . 153

SEVENTH CONFERENCE. The Effects of the Prayer of Recollection 163

EIGHTH CONFERENCE. Other Ways in Which We Can Render God Present to Us 171

NINTH CONFERENCE. A Practical Method of Making the Prayer of Recollection 181

TENTH CONFERENCE. Contemplation—Its First Degree 189

ELEVENTH CONFERENCE. The Second and Third Degrees of Contemplation 198

TWELFTH CONFERENCE. The Remote Preparation for Mental Prayer 205

THIRTEENTH CONFERENCE. The Acquired Prayers of Quietude and Union 213

FOURTEENTH CONFERENCE. The First Degree of Prayer (I) 224

FIFTEENTH CONFERENCE. The Second and Third Degrees of Prayer 229

PAGE

Sixteenth Conference. The Fourth Degree of Prayer 236

Seventeenth Conference. The Fifth and Sixth Degrees of Prayer 245

Eighteenth Conference. The Seventh and Eighth Degrees of Prayer 250

Nineteenth Conference. Every Fervent Soul May Entertain the Aspiration of Tending to the Perfection of the Mystic Life 258

Twentieth Conference. Frequent Confession, a Means of Uniting Us with God 269

Twenty-First Conference. Holy Communion, the Most Efficacious Means of our Sanctification . 279

Twenty-Second Conference. The Practice of the Church Relative to Frequent and Daily Communion 286

Twenty-Third Conference. Devotion to the Blessed Virgin 292

SUPPLEMENT

First Conference. The Holy Ghost, our Consoler 305

Second Conference. The Holy Ghost our Teacher 312

Third Conference. The Holy Ghost our Strengthener and Healer 319

Fourth Conference. The Precious Blood . . 328

Fifth Conference. The Bloodsheddings of the Saviour 340

Sixth Conference. The Power of the Precious Blood 350

Seventh Conference. The Blood of the Redemption 361

CONFERENCES ON THE INTERIOR LIFE

VOLUME II

FIRST PART

The Illuminative Way—Continued

FIRST CONFERENCE

Prayer

I

1. In the preceding volume we considered the sources of the spiritual life; grace, the virtues, the lights and gifts of the Holy Ghost. We now proceed to the study of the means of spiritual progress given us by God. Among those the great and essential one is prayer. This means is commended to us universally by our Lord Jesus Christ and the Saints. "We must always pray." "Pray, and strength shall

be given you from on high." "Be instant in prayer." "Ask, and ye shall receive, that your joy may be full." "Whatsoever you shall ask the Father in my name, He will give it you." "Pray at all times, lifting up your hands to the Father of lights, for such is the will of God in Christ Jesus to you all," etc.

2. Now, with regard to prayer, two things are to be maintained: first, that it is our highest privilege in life; secondly, that it is a practice of absolute necessity to us in our present dependent and fallen condition.

Prayer is our highest privilege in life, I say; for, what is prayer? "It is," says St. Thomas, "the union of the soul with God."

Reflect on all that is contained in that short sentence. Prayer is the union of the soul with God. Here in this life we are in immediate touch with the sensible world. We see its beauty in the smiling meadow, in the silver lake, in the azure sky, in the broad expanse of ocean. We hear its music in the deep roar of the elements, in the harmonious movements of the stars, in the varied melody of the song bird. We catch its charms in the ever-recurring changes of the seasons and in the mysterious operations of nature.

Alas! in all this we are made sensible of its utter inability to make us truly happy, or to raise us up from our condition of wretchedness and sin. Union with God, our last end, can alone give us all that our souls desire or demand. Well, prayer it is that effects in us that union. Prayer it is that withdraws us from sensible things, with their gross joys and their real pains; or else makes of them so many stepping-stones by which we mount to God, that we may take delight in Him alone.

Prayer is the union of the soul with God. People in the world look upon it as a great privilege to be admitted to confer with their sovereign: to be invited to a royal reception; to be admitted to terms of intimacy with their ruler. This privilege is the noblest in the land. For it the statesman will go through the drudgery of years of public service. For it the soldier will wade through fields of blood. For it noble lords and ladies will intrigue and fawn. And why? That they may share somewhat in the majesty that circles round the throne. Ah, what is all this in comparison with the privilege conferred on you and me by prayer, which unites us in terms of closest intimacy with Him who is "King of Kings and Lord of Lords"?

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3. But prayer is something more than our greatest privilege. It is a practice of absolute necessity to us in our present dependent and fallen condition. To prove this, I need not quote the oft-repeated precept of Scripture, commanding us to lead lives of continual prayer. Let me only lay down what theology teaches, and say that we are in a condition of absolute inability to do the least supernatural work without the assistance of grace. But the grace to do good, to persevere in good, and to work out our salvation, God will not give us, unless we pray.

Neither can we, morally speaking, avoid falling into sin without prayer. How do I prove this? By reason of the sin of our First Parents the integrity of our nature has been grievously impaired. Darkness and ignorance affect the human mind that, before now was filled with divine light, and that saw truth with such clearness. The will, hitherto submissive to the law of God, the will that was all on fire with divine love, is now become seditious and inclined to evil. A thousand turbulent passions, hitherto kept in abeyance, now rise in revolt against mind and will, and clamor for indulgence. Concupiscence asserts itself in our lower na-

ture. These internal enemies leagued with the tempter who has now gained the mastery over us, continually beset us and entice us to the commission of sin.

I beg of you, dearly beloved, to pay attention to what I am about to say, and let my words sink into your hearts and be impressed on them as with a burning brand, so that to the day of your death you may not lose sight of them. Saint Augustine, the great Doctor of Grace, teaches that there are some of the precepts of the divine law which we cannot fulfill, whether through means of the strength we actually possess, or through the aid of the graces continually given us by God. This teaching of the holy Doctor has been adopted by the Council of Trent and confirmed as an article of Catholic belief. Is not this an astonishing doctrine, dearly beloved—that there are precepts of the divine law which we are bound to observe under pain of sin, and under threat of eternal punishment, yet are unable to observe them either of our own strength or with the help of the grace which God ordinarily sends us. What then are we to do, and how shall we escape from the wrath to come? Neither the holy Doctor who pro-

pounds the doctrine nor the Council that confirms it, leaves us in doubt as to what we are to do. "God," says the Saint, "does not command impossibilities; but by commanding, he admonishes you to do what you can, and to ask help in that which you cannot do, and He will assist you that you may be able to do it."

4. Do you wish to know a particular adversary that cannot be overcome except by prayer? That adversary is the temptation of the flesh. "This frightful enemy," says St. Liguori, "by its attacks covers the soul with darkness, banishes the remembrance of all her good resolutions, makes her disregard the truths of faith, and extinguishes almost all fear of divine vengeance. And this power of the flesh is strengthened by our natural inclinations, which drag us with the greatest violence to the indulgence of carnal pleasures."

That this is so, Our Lord has taught us in the Gospel. Once (it was after He came down from Mount Thabor, on which He had been transfigured) He found His disciples gathered around a poor demoniacal boy, who was possessed by an impure spirit. Though they had received power from Him to expel devils from

the bodies of the possessed, yet this one resisted them, and he had to be ejected by our Lord Himself. Afterwards the disciples came to Him and asked Him: "Master, why was it that we were unable to exorcise the demoniac to-day?" And our Lord replied, "O ye of little faith, did you not know that this devil is cast out only by prayer—by prayer and fasting?"

Solomon, the wisest of men, confesses his inability, and hence ours, to cope with this antagonist without the assistance of prayer. "I knew," he says, "that I could not be chaste except the Lord gave it; I went, therefore, to the Lord and besought Him [for this gift] with my whole heart." Would that he had always continued in this knowledge, and that he had persevered in beseeching the Lord for the gift of chastity. We would not then have the grief of witnessing the sad spectacle of this man who was a saint in his youth, whose every sentence was a parable of divine wisdom, fall away from grace, and dishonor his gray hairs and his world-renowned wisdom by the most frightful excesses of impurity. Prayer is, as Saint Gregory of Nyssa says, the safeguard of chastity.

II

1. Sometimes a penitent will come to confession and will say: "Father, I am very negligent in saying my prayers. I have not gone on my knees this last month. I never think of God during the day. I do not pray in time of temptation."

To such a one I reply: "My child, you could not have given a better indication of the state of your soul to your spiritual father than by this acknowledgment." Could not anyone with a logical mind, and with the guidance of those principles drawn from the teaching of the Council of Trent and of Holy Scripture, immediately infer what is to follow? You have not prayed; therefore, unless God has extended an extraordinary providence over you, you have fallen into many sins of impurity.

Can divine truth, which teaches that the demon of impurity is cast out only by prayer, and which also declares that we cannot be chaste without prayer,—can divine truth be made void, that truth concerning which our Lord tells us that, though Heaven and earth may pass away, His word shall not fail? Oh, no; the soul that has given up the frequent

exercise of prayer cannot long be chaste; for she has thrown aside the only armor that could make her invulnerable against the assaults of the impure spirit. And hence Saint Paul in his Epistle to the Ephesians counsels them to put on the armor of prayer. "Put ye on," he says, "the armor of God, that you may be able to stand against the assaults of the devil. For our wrestling is not with flesh and blood," as when man meets man in the arena, "but with principalities and powers, with the rulers of this dark world, with the spirit of wickedness in high places. Take unto you the armor of God, that you may be able to resist in the day of temptation, and stand in all things perfect . . . by all prayers and supplications, praying at all times in the spirit, and in the same watching with all instance and supplication for all the saints."

2. "Pray, then, at all times, lifting up your hands to the Father of grace, for such is the command of God in Christ Jesus to you all." "Pray, and strength shall be given you from on high." Be faithful in prayer morning, noon, and evening. Be like the Psalmist, who speaks to the Lord, and says: "I present myself before you in the morning, my eyes have awak-

ened before the sun, that I might meditate upon your word: I sought you from the dawn of day." And again, "Seven times a day I speak words of praise to you"; and "at night I bedew my couch with the tears of prayer and compunction of heart." Thus will you advance in grace and virtue, and the words of the first Psalm can be applied to you: "Blessed is the man whose will is to do the law of the Lord, and on his law he shall meditate day and night"; that is to say, blessed is the man of an upright heart, who is devoted to a life of prayer. "Such a man is like the tree that is planted by the running stream, that brings forth its fruit in due season."

The Psalmist had represented in his fancy's gaze a sultry Eastern land, where running waters are scarce and precious,—a thirsty land where only the tree whose roots are bathed by the running stream rears itself in the glory of foliage and blossom, and brings forth the rich harvest of fruit. And so if God looks down on the desert of this world, His eyes fall here and there on a delightful object. It is on the soul of the man or woman given to prayer. And he knows that as the result of prayer there courses at the bottom of their hearts the nour-

ishing water of grace, that grace which puts forth the rich foliage of holy intention, blossoms in good works, and produces the fruit of merit, of merit which, matured here in life, will be garnered hereafter in Heaven.

SECOND CONFERENCE

The First Condition of Prayer

1. Among the practices that should be cultivated in an especial manner by us, religious practices that should mark us out as men and women distinct from and altogether lifted above the general body of the people, an important one and an essential one is this of holy prayer.

The sublimity of the state to which we are called, the holiness of the things we have continually to treat with, the edification we are expected to give to the laity, the correspondence God looks for in us, and the life of high perfection demanded of us in return for the graces and privileges of our state; all require of us that we be men and women of prayer.

And now, as this is a practice you have been acquainted with from your childhood, nay, the most familiar to you of all the practices that pertain to piety, I will to-day only put before you its necessary conditions. That I may do

so, permit me, first of all, to say that the word has a double signification. It is taken, in the first place, to embrace all acts pertaining to the virtue of religion. Secondly, it has a more particular signification, and it denotes petition to God for those things that are beneficial to the body or to the soul, that contribute to our spiritual or temporal well-being.

Taken in the former sense, it embraces, as I have said, all those acts that pertain to the virtue of religion. Religion is that virtue by which we render to God the worship that is His due. This worship comprises many things—adoration, by which we acknowledge Him as the Supreme Being; sacrifice, by which we revere His sovereign dominion over all creatures; praise, by which we celebrate His greatness; thanksgiving, by which we testify to Him as far as we can how sensible we are of His benefits; prayer, by which we acknowledge Him as the Author of all good, and at the same time avow our indigence and our needs by asking of Him helps which are necessary for us, whether in our spiritual or in our temporal state.

Prayer taken in the one or in the other of those senses must be accompanied by certain

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necessary conditions, without which it is not only useless, but bad and pernicious. The conditions are: that it be made with preparation, humility, confidence, attention, and perseverance.

2. Let me speak of one of those conditions to-day; namely, preparation. Preparation is required, as we are told by Scripture in formal terms. "Before prayer," says the Book of Ecclesiasticus, "prepare thy soul, and be not as a man that tempteth God." (Eccl. xviii, 23.)

This is in accordance with common sense. Any action that is of ordinary importance demands preparation. The lawyer who brings his case into court without studying his brief beforehand, is but mocking his client, and he will bring humiliation on himself before the judge. The doctor who undertakes a surgical operation without previous study and preparation runs the risk of killing his patient. The pupil who comes to class without preparation of the subject-matter fails to secure merit marks; and so, also, the suppliant or the worshipper who appears before God in prayer without preparation of heart only tempts God, and makes a mockery of Him, and he will bring

on himself punishment rather than grace and mercy.

You will ask, in what does this preparation consist? It consists, first of all and chiefly, in this, that we approach God by recalling the wandering powers of our soul and concentrating them on Him by an act of faith in His unseen presence.

This our Lord Himself would seem to intimate to us. For, condescending to teach His disciples to pray, He said to them: "Take ye heed that when you pray, ye be not as the hypocrites that love to stand and pray in the synagogues and corners of the streets; but you, when you pray, enter into your chamber, and having shut the door, pray to your Father in secret, and your Father who seeth in secret will repay you." (Matt. vi, 5–6.) What is this chamber into which He would have us enter, if not our heart? And what is the door He would have us shut on ourselves, if not the will which stays our faculties—mind, heart, and senses, and concentrates them on the act of prayer and interior recollection? "We are to pray," He says, "in secret." For true prayer is not the external motion of our lips or the

articulation of our voice, which of themselves signify nothing. It is rather the tending of our heart to God by acts of worship, humility and love, the spontaneous outpourings of the inflamed heart where the formality of spoken words is unattended to. We pray to our "Father." Oh, yes, this is the true relation in which He would have us conceive Him when we set ourselves to pray. He is a most kind and tender Father, who loves to see His children gather around Him to pay reverence to Him and to lay their wants before Him. This being realized, all the other dispositions of fruitful prayer: reverence, trust, candor, love, humility, and confidence, will be present also. Our prayer will be a heart to heart interchange of thought and affection, such as takes place between parent and child; and there is begotten in us a feeling of sweetness and strength, as in those who have partaken of a palatable and nourishing refection.

This concentration of our faculties in prayer is further helped by our withdrawal from the conversation of the world. This is shown us from the words of Holy Scripture and from the example of the saints and even of Our Lord Himself. "I will lead her," says the

prophet, Osee, speaking of the chosen soul, "I will lead her into the desert, and I will there speak to her heart." Hence the tendency of prayerful souls "to build for themselves solitudes," where they may be brought face to face with nature and with nature's God. See what a Carmel, or a Horeb were to an Elias or to a Moses. See what the vast desert was to a St. John the Baptist, a St. Jerome, or the hermits of the Thebaid. See what a Thabor, or an Olivet, or the dark shades of a Gethsemani were to Our Lord Himself; and though He was always in His Father's presence, still would He give us an example as to the conditions of perfect prayer.

"Pray to your Father *in secret.*" By this concentration of our faculties on God there is begotten in the soul a singular silence, to which we give the name of "recollection," which tends to awaken in us the strong cry of belief and trust, which is succeeded by the other acts of adoration, praise, thanksgiving, love, desire, and petition, which together make up the great act of religion in which the grace of prayer essentially consists.

THIRD CONFERENCE

The Last Four Conditions of Prayer

1. In our former conference we considered the first condition of prayer, namely, preparation.

To-day let us consider briefly the other four conditions. In doing so, I would have you conceive prayer in its general sense, as signifying acts pertaining to the virtue of religion, as well as in its more restricted sense, as signifying petition for the things that pertain to our spiritual or temporal well-being.

The second condition of prayer is *humility*. This is a condition without which there can be no good prayer, no hope of being heard. On the contrary one is assured of his petition's and his worship's being rejected. "God resists the proud," it is the Divine Word that assures us of it, "and He gives His grace and His favors to the humble." "He sees the proud afar off." He keeps them at a distance from him; "but His eyes are ever turned towards the meek

and humble." We have a very striking example of this in the persons of the Pharisee and the Publican of whom we read in Scripture. "Two men," says our Lord, "went up to the Temple to pray—the one, a Pharisee, the other, a Publican." The Pharisee, in his pride and self-sufficiency, standing up, said in a loud voice: "I give thee thanks that I am not as the rest of men, extortioners, unjust, adulterers, as is also this publican. I fast twice in the week. I give tithes of all I possess." Meantime the publican, struck with contrition for his past sins, and deeming himself unworthy, would not so much as mingle with the crowd of pious worshippers within, but bowed his head and struck his breast, saying in his humility and sense of unworthiness: "God be merciful to me, a sinner." "I say to you," says Our Lord, "this man went down to his house justified rather than the other; for everyone that exalteth himself shall be humbled, and he that humbleth himself shall be exalted."

Do we not on occasion consider ourselves very devout? And if God in His goodness vouchsafes to give us the slightest touch of sensible devotion, do we not consider it as given us because of our merit; and thereupon

begin to contrast our own seeming perfection with the imperfect and indevout conduct of others, and set ourselves accordingly above them?

How, with our prayer made with such dispositions, can we expect to obtain what we ask of God, or that He will accept our acts of veneration? And is it any wonder that Our Lord, when He sees us so full of overweening pride, leaves our souls in darkness and aridity?

Let us never forget that at prayer we come before God as beggars, to ask help in our needs, and as such we must conduct ourselves with heart-felt sentiments of humility. Thus, and thus alone, shall we obtain access to the throne of divine mercy, and God will cause to echo in our soul the words spoken in the parable: "We shall rise from our prayer justified," because "everyone that humbleth himself shall be exalted."

2. The third condition of prayer is *confidence*. This confidence is founded on the knowledge of God's infinite goodness and power, and on the many assurances He has given us of His willingness to hear and help us. He is pleased with our worship and praise and He takes complacency in the many little signs of

reverence we pay Him; moreover, He gives most willingly when petitioned for favors. He wishes to be asked, though He most willingly gives, in order that prayer may purify our hearts, test them, and render them more worthy of His gifts. Hence, what is wonderful, as St. Cyprian notes, Christ orders His disciples to pray to the Lord of the harvest to send laborers into His harvest, when the same Lord of the harvest has Himself the most ardent desire to send them, and exercises the most vigilant care over it.

St. James says: "If any of you want wisdom, let him ask it of God—and it shall be given him; but let him ask it in faith"; that is, in confidence, "not wavering. For he that wavereth is like a wave of the sea, which is moved and carried about by the wind; therefore, let not that man think that he shall receive anything of the Lord." "Let him ask it in faith, not wavering." This same condition our Lord insists on in His many promises as to the efficacy of prayer. "All things whatsoever you shall ask in prayer, believing," that is, asking with confidence, "you shall receive." (Matt. xxi, 22.)

3. The fourth condition of prayer is *devo-*

tion. Devotion is made up of several qualities, among which the chief are: attention of mind, fervor of heart, together with exterior respect and reverence.

Attention of mind,—that is to say, we must seriously apply ourselves to what we petition; fervor of heart; we must have great sentiments of love and tenderness for God; exterior respect; we must keep ourselves in becoming postures and ones full of religion.

Let us here deplore our astonishing frailty, which permits us not to remain a moment in the presence of God without being troubled with the phantoms of our imagination. How many distractions, how many ridiculous and only too often evil and horrible thoughts fill our mind every time we set ourselves to the exercise of prayer? Who can flatter himself with having made in his life a quarter of an hour's prayer without distractions? But remember, although it sometimes happens that the distractions which come to us while praying are not of our making, yet we do not accustom ourselves to combat useless thoughts. We, on the contrary, give free rein to our mind, and, to employ the thought of a holy personage, we make of our imagination a

thoroughfare where all have the right of way. Let us imitate the conduct of the patriarch Abraham, when by the command of God he went to sacrifice his son upon the mountain. He said to his servants: "Stay you here at the foot of the mountain." When entering into the chapel or some other place to pray, when commencing our prayers, we must say the same thing to the cares of the world, to strange thoughts: "Stay you here, and leave me free for some time." We must not be surprised if our prayers are not heard. St. James tells us the reason of it, and we know it well enough ourselves. "You ask," says the Apostle "and you receive not." Why? "Because you ask amiss." You do not bring to prayer attention and the other necessary dispositions. We pray without attention and from pure habit. We pray without devotion. Our heart is as a dry and sterile soil. We pray without respect, and how can we be heard? Are not our prayers only too often a mockery of God, and cannot the words of Isaias addressed to the unfaithful Jews be with striking aptitude applied to us: "This people draw near me with their mouths, and with their lips they glorify me, but their heart is far from me, saith the Lord"?

4. The last condition of prayer is *perseverance*. Our Lord teaches us this condition in the Gospel. "Ask," He says to us, "and you shall receive." This is not all. "Seek, and you shall find"; that is to say, ask with urgency; ask a long time. There is more still: "Knock, and it shall be opened to you"; that is to say, continue asking until you have received. Fear not to render yourself importunate. This kind of importunity is agreeable to God, and does violence, so to speak, to His mercy. The amiable Saviour employs the comparison of a man who, having gone to ask bread of his friend, was at first refused; but having continued to importune him, he obtained what he asked. "Even so," He says, "if you persevere in asking, you will obtain what you ask."

Behold, what you ought to know and practise on the subject of prayer. It is absolutely necessary. Without it there is no salvation. Prayer is commanded very strictly. It is appointed as the channel of all graces. It is so efficacious that God refuses to it nothing that is expedient for the good of His servants and His children.

Practise, then, this holy exercise with earnestness. Pray often. Pray with all the dis-

positions that God requires of you; pray with earnest prepartion beforehand. Pray with humility; with faith and confidence; with attention, respect, and devotion; with perseverance; with a perfect submission to the orders of Divine Providence over you. It will be the means of your being heard, and will obtain for you in this life all the helps, all the graces, and all the means necessary for your sanctification; and in the other, eternal glory, which I wish you, in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost.

FOURTH CONFERENCE

The "Our Father"

The Address

I

1. It is not enough to know the excellence and necessity of prayer, or to be acquainted with its qualifications and conditions. We must further become acquainted with and practise the most excellent forms of prayer given us in the sacred liturgy and esteemed and practised by religious everywhere.

Among those undoubtedly the most excellent and esteemed is that taught us by our Lord Himself and known universally as the "Our Father." This prayer I purpose to open the sense of for you and to show you the beauty of its simple, yet sublime petitions.

It had origin thus wise, as is recalled in the Gospel of St. Luke.

When our Lord was with His disciples, one

of them said to Him: "Lord, teach us to pray, as John also taught his disciples." And Jesus, with His wonted affability, condescended to the petition of this earnest man, and opening His mouth He taught the disciples what has been ever since known as the "Lord's Prayer." And first of all, he instructed them as to the dispositions they should bring to this holy exercise as is recalled in the sixth chapter of St. Matthew. "Take heed," says He, ". . . that when you pray you be not as the hypocrites that love to stand and pray in the synagogues and corners of the streets, that they may be seen by men. Amen, I say to you, they have received their reward. But you, when you shall pray, enter into your chamber, and having shut the door, pray to your Father in secret, and your Father, who seeth in secret, will repay you. And when you are praying speak not much as the heathens do. For they think that in much speaking they may be heard. Be not ye, therefore, like them; for your Father knoweth what is needful for you before you ask Him." After that He continued: "Thus, therefore, shall you pray: Our Father who art in Heaven"; and the rest, as you know it so well.

First let me say with regard to it that of all forms of prayer, whether in the pages of the Old or of the New Testament, it is the most perfect; as the following reason will show. Prayer made in the name of Jesus Christ and with the necessary conditions, is always agreeable to God and profitable to him who makes it. But can we pray more truly in the name of our Saviour than when we have on our lips the prayer that He Himself taught us? No; there is no prayer dearer to the heart of God, none more perfect, none more salutary, none that ascends with greater facility to Heaven; since from thence it has descended. It is true, we can employ other formulas and other expressions in speaking to God, but we cannot address to Him other petitions than those that are contained in the Lord's Prayer. And why? Because it contains all; because if we had need of anything else, the Saviour would doubtless have willed to express it in the prayer which He has taught us. In asking anything else, is it not as if you would say to our Lord: "I know my wants and what is useful and necessary for me better than Thou"? No, no; you do not know better than the Son of God what you ought to petition Heaven for.

2. Hear Jesus Christ, then, and say with heart and soul His divine prayer: "Our Father who art in heaven. . . ."

The first word that the Son of God makes us pronounce is the sweet name of "Father." Have you a favor to ask of an influential person in the world? You take care to commence by giving him the name and the titles that are dearest to him. So, according to the order of our Lord Himself, when we pray to God, we forget, so to speak, all the attributes which put Him at too great a distance from us, and which could inspire us only with sentiments of fear; and we all, just or sinners, give to the God of glory and majesty the sweet name of Father; and this, because it is especially under this name, which bespeaks indulgence and tenderness, that He wishes to be known. And is not God truly our Father? Does not the Apostle Saint Paul say to us that our God is the source of all fatherhood,—that is, of all goodness? Is not the Lord pleased to call Himself "the Father of mercies and the God of all consolation"? Oh, yes, the name of Father belongs truly to God. The proof of this is in the great mysteries of *Creation, Providence* and *Redemption.*

And, first, of the creation. Did He not create us? Did He not make us out of nothing? Did He not make us to His own image and likeness? And thus did He not earn the title of Father? We are the children of God, then. "We are the offspring of God," says Saint Paul, and it is "from him we have life, and movement, and being." He created us to His own image and likeness, and He did not accord the same favor to other beings. This is why He wished that Holy Scripture should call Him the Father of all men, and especially of the faithful.

But His paternal goodness did not end there; for it is a father's duty to watch over and provide for his offspring. And our Heavenly Father watches continually over us, and with such solicitude that a hair cannot fall from our head without His permission. His tender providence sends us every day the things which sustain our life. He provides us continually with food, and raiment, and lodging, so that we are in want of nothing. He has us "engraven in His hands," this God of mercy. He assures us that He will never abandon us. "Can a woman forget her infant, so as not to have pity on the child of her womb? And if

she should forget, yet will not I forget thee!" Nay, He wills even that a prince of Heaven be always at our side to watch over and protect us. We are the children of God, then, and we have received the spirit of children of adoption, in virtue of which we cry: "Abba, Father."

3. But, alas! we have sinned! We were made the children of the devil, and Heaven was closed against us. But God has redeemed us, and by so doing He has acquired a new title to Fatherhood. "Behold, what manner of charity the Father hath bestowed upon us, that we should be called, and should be, the children of God." See His beloved Son made flesh and laden with our iniquities. "He is made obedient even to the death of the cross," to purchase us and to save us; to make us the children of God, His brothers, and the co-heirs of His glory. I have a good right, then, to address to you those beautiful words of the Apostle St. John: "My beloved, we are now the children of God, and what we shall be is not yet seen. We know that when He shall manifest Himself, we shall be like Him, because we shall see Him as He is."

Divine Lord, it is not without a design full

of charity that You wish our prayers to commence with this word, "Father." It is in order, moreover, that this sweet name may inspire us with a firm confidence in the goodness of Him to whom we pray. What is it that God will not give to those who address themselves to Him: since He gave them the grace to be His children before even they began to pray to Him? Since He grants us the liberty to approach Him as children approach their father, to ask him all that we wish for, it is scarcely in His power to refuse us anything. And this is what He seems to intimate to us in the Gospel: "If you then, all wicked as you are, know how to give good things to your children; how much more will not your Father, who is in heaven, give good things to those that ask them of Him?"

II

1. But let us proceed. Our Lord has taught us to say, not "My Father," but "*Our* Father." And why?

Is it not in order to excite charity among us, and to teach us that we ought to desire the good and the spiritual advancement of others even as we desire our own; and that we ought to

ask the favors of God for them even as for ourselves? God willingly hears a Christian who prays not only for himself, but also for others. He wishes that we say "Our Father" in order to bring home to us the fact that we are all brethren, and that we have only one Father, who is in Heaven; in order that we may renounce pride and self-love, which incite us to lift ourselves above others; in order that we may destroy among us all seeds of hatred and discord, and that we may live together in the unity of faith, of sentiment, and of word. The early Christians so well understood the meaning of the words "Our Father," that St. Luke could say of those of Jerusalem that "they had but one heart and one soul in God," and the very pagans, seeing them so intimately united, cried out in astonishment: "See how they love one another!"

2. God is everywhere. He fills all space by His immensity. Why, then, does our Lord wish that we say "Our Father, who art in Heaven"? It is because in Heaven God has established His throne. It is there that He manifests His majesty and glory to His elect. It is there that He multiplies the outpourings of His liberality and causes happiness to flow

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into the souls of His saints. It is because Jesus wishes to awaken our faith and strengthen our hope by putting in some sort before our eyes the ravishing objects which ought to satisfy the infinite desire of our hearts. It is because He would point out to us the home of the elect, where we expect our "exceeding great reward," and towards which we ought to lift our thoughts and aspirations.

Yes, when we say "Our Father, who art in heaven," let us lift our thoughts above the things of earth. Let us take care not to wish or ask for temporal advantages, which are often very dangerous, when our heavenly Father invites us to ask Him for eternal blessings. God loves you, for He is your Father. He knows your wants. He knows what is necessary for you, what will be of advantage for you to obtain. Have confidence. He will grant you temporal blessings; but it will be when "you seek first of all the Kingdom of God and His justice; then all things else will be given you" as a surplus.

3. Again, when you say: "Father, who art in heaven," enter into your own heart; it is there that you will find Him. Where the King is, there is His court. And did not our Lord

say: "If anyone love Me," *i. e.,* if anyone is in the state of grace, "My Father will love him," and: "We," *i. e.,* the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Ghost, "will come to him and we will take up our dwelling place in his heart"? You have no need to look beyond the stars, therefore, when you are at prayer. Close your eyes. Enter into the chamber of your heart and shut the door behind you. Close your heart to worldly thoughts and concerns. Pray to your Father in secret, and your Father will hear you. You will find a heaven of peace and joy in your interior, and you will be constrained to cry out with St. Thomas, and this without hurt to heart or head: "My God and my all."

4. Every time you wish to address your prayer to God, don't forget to say to yourself: "I am going to entertain myself with my God, and to speak to Him of the things I need for my soul and for my body. 'I will speak to my God, whereas I am but dust and ashes.' I will speak to my God who is in Heaven; who permits me to call Him Father; to my God who loves me as an only child; who each day watches over me and covers me with His paternal solicitude. He knows my wants, but He wishes that I pray to Him. I ought, then, to make my

prayer with all the confidence of a child who speaks to his father." Yes, it is thus that you must pray to your Father who is in Heaven. Repeat often the prayer the Lord has taught you, and be assured your God, your Father, will listen to your petitions, will hear them, and will grant you grace to make you happy in this world and in the next.

FIFTH CONFERENCE

The "Our Father"

First Petition—"Hallowed be Thy Name"

I

1. I have already commented on the opening words of the Lord's Prayer. I have pointed out the titles on which is founded the most beautiful and touching appellation of Father with which it commences. I have explained why our Lord would have us address Him by the common appellation of Father. I have shown why, although God is everywhere, yet He would have us lift our hearts in prayer to Him in Heaven. I have shown how the just man's heart is the abode of God, and how our Lord would have us enter thither during prayer and shut out from it all worldly thoughts and concerns.

It becomes my duty now to comment on the second member of the prayer: "Hallowed be

Thy Name." But before doing so, let me lay before you the plan of this divine prayer as given us by our Lord. It is made up of two distinct parts—the address and the petitions. The address is as I have already explained to you. The petitions are seven in number, and they contain all that we can ask of God, whether for the advancement of His own glory, or for our interests, spiritual or temporal.

The first three petitions have respect to God, and in them we beg Him—that His name be blessed—that He would reign over us—and that His will be accomplished. In putting these petitions at the beginning of His prayer, our Lord would recall to our minds the first end of prayer. That end is none other than to honor God. And as well-reared and dutiful children seek to have their father esteemed and honored in preference to themselves, so we put at the head of our prayer those petitions that concern the honor and well-being of our Heavenly Father, before we petition Him for the things that concern ourselves.

2. In the other four petitions we lay before God our wants: we beg Him for the nourishment of our soul and body, the necessaries of life; we pray Him to grant us the pardon of

our sins; to aid us in our weaknesses, in order to overcome temptation; to deliver us from all evils in this life and the life to come.

Such is the plan of this divine prayer, which contains all that is most salutary, all that the most learned doctors, and souls the most advanced in holiness can say. It is an inexhaustible treasury of riches and graces. Of this you may judge by the wealth of meaning underlying the words of the first petition: "Hallowed be Thy Name." In addressing ourselves to God, just as in petitioning an influential person of the world, we desire and petition only the things we stand in need of. Now, nothing is wanting to the Divine Nature. It possesses all imaginable perfections in an infinite degree. It can receive nothing in time which God did not possess from all eternity. He is not susceptible either of increase or augmentation; since He is infinite and perfect in all orders. The Name of God denotes His essence: that is to say, God Himself: all that He is, all His being, all His divine attributes and perfections; in such sort that this Name is infinitely holy and unchangeable.

3. What do we ask, then, by this first petition of the Lord's Prayer: "Hallowed be Thy

Name"? Do we petition that God become more holy still? This would be to do an injury to Him, who is holiness itself, and whose perfections are infinite. What we petition God for, then, has reference neither to His perfections nor to His nature, but solely to His external glory.

"Hallowed be Thy Name." Behold the first desire of a good child: he desires that his father be known, loved, cherished, and esteemed in the world. Such is the aspiration and such the wish that you form at the commencement of your prayer. You testify to your Heavenly Father the ardent desire you have to see Him, who is worthy of all glory, revered, served, glorified, and adored by the whole world. You beg that His Name, that is, Himself, be blessed and exalted by all men. You beg that God grant you the grace necessary that you also may be able to contribute to the glory of your Father, and offer your share of the homage due to Him by living in grace and in the practice of good works.

Such is the first petition we make to God after having acknowledged Him as our Father; because, as St. John Chrysostom says, "the desire that God be glorified is essential to

a Christian; and the glory of God ought to be his first and principal object—the object that should occupy the first place in his heart."

II

1. In order that you may have a more perfect comprehension of this petition you must know that although God is infinitely holy, nevertheless, His holiness is very far from being acknowledged by the whole world. To see this you have only to cast a glance over the earth.

We cannot be ignorant of the fact that there are still whole peoples who have not the happiness of knowing the true God, who do not honor and adore Him. Such are the nations that are still in the darkness of paganism and idolatry. Again, many know the true God, but they do not know Him as He wishes to be known. They do not render Him the homage of a pure faith and a perfect worship. Such are heretics and schismatics. Besides those two classes, see the many others who, though they were reared in the true Church of God; and who, though they believe the Word of the Heavenly Father whom they adore; yet do

not glorify the Name of the Lord; for they live bad lives. These are sinners.

Well, when we make this petition, "Hallowed be Thy Name," we beg that God would deign to cause the light of faith to shine before the eyes of poor pagans, that they may come out of the darkness of infidelity and enter into the flock of Jesus Christ. We pray Him to deign to recall unhappy heretics into the bosom of the true Church. We pray Him to touch the hearts of sinners and lead them to a lasting conversion, to a sincere penance. We beg Him to cause us all to be convinced that there is nothing which we ought to fear so much as to offend the Lord or to lose His grace. Behold the petition contained in these words, "Hallowed be Thy Name." We pray that in all parts of the world hearts may be lifted to God; may attach themselves to God, and present to Him a homage pure and holy and worthy of Him, as the angels and the elect pay it to Him in the Kingdom of Heaven.

2. I want you to note well that in petitioning that the Name of your Heavenly Father be blessed, you acknowledge that you ought also to do all you can that this adorable Name be in a worthy manner glorified among you.

You take, then, the resolution of performing your works, of acquitting yourself of your duties, of transacting your affairs for the greater glory of God.

You will, moreover, by good advice and salutary instructions, try to lead others, and especially those under you to conduct themselves in a Christian manner like yourselves. You will not say; you will not do; and you will not allow, anything that can displease God. You will prevent evil wherever you can. You will object to anyone's saying unseemly things before you. You will constantly give good example. You will apply to yourselves, and you will fulfill those words of the Saviour: "So let your light shine before men that they may see your good works and glorify your Father who is in heaven."

Is it thus we act? Alas, how our acts and our conduct contradict our vows and our prayers! See and judge. Each day we say: "Hallowed be Thy Name." May God be known, loved, honored and served by the whole world; and each day we outrage the Lord, and each day our criminal mouth gives forth sinful and imperfect words, and each day we deliver our hearts to sin. Each day we say: "May Your

Name, O Lord, be blessed"; and we do not what we could and ought to do to extend the glory of God. It is through our fault, maybe, that those under us remain in a guilty ignorance of the things of God: of the truths of religion. Among us the Lord is neither known, nor loved, nor served as He ought to be. The fault is ours, and we who act thus are wanting in an essential duty.

From this moment let us renounce what God forbids. Let us renounce sin. Let us love to procure the glory of God. Let us seek before all things the Kingdom of Heaven; that is to say, God Himself, and holiness, which conducts us to Him. Then we shall say with truth: "Hallowed be Thy Name," and God will hear us. He will be blessed in us and around us, and His benediction will become our portion for this world and the next.

SIXTH CONFERENCE

The "Our Father"

Second and Third Petitions

I

1. In the first petition of the "Our Father" we express the wish that the Lord our God be known, loved, honored, and served by the whole world, as He is known, loved, honored, and served in Heaven: "Hallowed be Thy Name." In addressing this petition to God we take upon ourselves in some sort the obligation of walking constantly in the practice of virtue, in order to contribute to the glory of God; for, it is in His saints that the Lord finds His glory. This I explained to you in my last discourse. Now we will go on to the consideration of the second and third petitions of the Lord's Prayer.

What do we beg from the bounty of God by those words: "Thy Kingdom come"? We ask

not for one kingdom, but for three; all offering us the most precious advantages, and all worthy of our most ardent desires.

We pray for the Kingdom of the Church which Jesus Christ founded, which He governs unceasingly, and from which He will never withdraw His providence and support.

We pray for the Kingdom of grace, that it may enlighten, animate, and strengthen all hearts, enable them to resist temptation, and to surmount the obstacles with which the way to Heaven is strewn.

We petition, finally, for the Kingdom which the Lord recommended us to seek first and before all, the Kingdom of Paradise; that beautiful Kingdom of which, St Augustine says, "Truth is the sole king, charity the sole law, and which has eternity for duration."

Behold the grand and holy things we petition God for by the words: "Thy Kingdom come."

2. As to the first, the Kingdom of the Church, the prophet salutes it from afar and says: "Enlarge the place of thy tent, and stretch out the coverings of thy tabernacles. Spare not. Lengthen thy cords, and strengthen thy stakes; for, thou shalt pass on to the right

hand and the left. For, He that made thee shall rule over thee, the Lord of hosts is His name. Arise and be enlightened, O Jerusalem; for, thy light is come, and the glory of the Lord is risen upon thee. . . . And the Gentiles shall walk in thy light, and kings in the brightness of thy rising. Lift up thine eyes round about and see, all these are gathered together. They are come to thee. Thy sons shall come from afar, and thy daughters shall rise up at thy side."

It is the accomplishment of these words that we pray God to bring about in the world. "Thy Kingdom come." "May Thy Church, O my God," we say in effect, "be extended throughout the world. May the truth which You have taught to men shine as a torch before the eyes of all, and may the nations sitting in the darkness of idolatry and in the shadow of death arise. May they begin to love, receive, and accomplish the truth, which is the nourishment of the mind, and the life of the soul." "May Thy Kingdom come." May the nations and kings cease to conspire against the Christ of the Lord, and against His Church, the guardian of the one true religion. May all heresies be extinguished, and all schisms disappear. May unbelief cease upon the earth, so

that there may be but one flock and one shepherd to lead us in the way of truth before God." "Thy Kingdom come." "May the authority of the Church of God find docile hearts among all the disciples of Christ. May there be no longer found in the Church men who confess God with their mouths and deny Him by their actions; whose faith is a dead faith, and over whom sin and the devil reign as masters. May the House of God be swept and garnished, and may all in peace, security, and justice render to God the homage of thanksgiving and praise." The triumph of religion, the propagation of the faith, the prosperity of the Church; the extinction of all heresies and schisms, the conversion of all sinners! Behold what you petition in the first place by those words: "Thy Kingdom come."

3. But our weakness is great, and our falls are frequent. We make many good resolutions, but rarely put them into execution. With St. Paul, "we find another law in our members contradicting the law of our mind." "We do not the good that we love; but we do the evil that we hate." We have to sustain a terrible conflict against the powers of darkness, against our flesh, against the world, and we are so

feeble. We shall infallibly succumb if grace do not protect and strengthen us. But, "May Your Kingdom come!" O my God, and we shall triumph; for "we can do all things in Him that strengtheneth us." It is the Kingdom of grace, then, that we petition by those words: "Thy Kingdom come." Yes, we pray to God to aid us to destroy in our hearts the empire of sin, to eradicate our bad habits and inclinations. We pray Him to aid us to overcome our passions, in order that the charity of Jesus Christ may live in us; that we may do what God commands; that everything in us may give forth the good odor of Jesus Christ; that we may listen to His voice, and walk under His adorable direction.

Lastly, if we petition the Kingdom of truth on earth; the reign of truth, of grace, of charity, in our hearts, it is in order that we may arrive at a third Kingdom, that of the glory of Heaven. We beg that at the hour of our death the heavens may be open to us, and that a place be given us in the Paradise of the Lord, our God.

II

1. The foolish virgins of the Gospel peti-

tioned also to enter into the joy of the Lord, but this happiness was denied them. And why? It was because they had not done all they ought, in order to be heard. It was because something more than prayer was expected of them for the attainment of that great object.

We ask for Paradise; but will it be given us? God promises it not to the idle and the lazy; not to those who content themselves with saying: "Lord, Lord," but to those who do violence to themselves; "to those who do the will of his Father who is in heaven." For the Saviour says: "If you wish to have eternal life, keep the commandments." This is why our Saviour wished that to this petition there be immediately joined this other, the third of the "Our Father": "Thy will be done on earth, as it is in heaven." To obtain the fruit of this petition, God would have us imitate the conduct of His only Son. Now, the first word of our Lord on entering into the world was: "I am come not to do my own will, but the will of my Father, who sent me," and "He was obedient to death, even to the death of the cross."

And we also are sent into the world, not to do our own will, but the will of God, always

holy, always adorable. We ought, then, to do in all things what our heavenly Father wills, to fulfill His law, to bear with patience the cross He lays on our shoulders. But without the help of grace, shall we be strong enough to fulfill this holy duty?

2. Alas, we are so weak, so inconstant! It is for this reason that our Lord wished that we say to His heavenly Father: "O my God, let Thy will be done; let it be done on earth, even as the angels and saints do it in Heaven."

You ask the strength to serve the Lord all the days of your life in justice and holiness. You beg Him to incline your heart to the observance of His holy law, and to grant you the grace to walk with firmness and patience in the ways where His paternal providence may call you, in spite of the cries and complaints of the flesh, in spite of the railleries and contempt of the false wisdom of the world.

"May this divine will be done on earth, as it is in Heaven." In this you beg that all men during their life testify by their submission to their Sovereign Master the same fidelity, the same zeal, the same eagerness as the angels in Heaven show to Him. You beg that we all do

the holy will of the Lord our God as perfectly as the angels do it, in order that earth be for Him a spectacle as agreeable as Heaven.

3. "Thy will be done on earth, as it is in Heaven"; you beg grace, strength, courage, patience. Is it from your heart that you address this prayer to the Lord? If it is, "you will not be imprudent," says the Apostle, "but will learn what is the will of God." You should know that if your heavenly Father wishes you to suffer, it is in order to correct and save you. And whatever afflictions He sends you, you should not have even the thought of complaining, and you should not cease to bless the hand of God, our Father, who is in Heaven, and who wishes the happiness of His children.

"Thy Kingdom come." Let us prove that this wish is truly from our hearts, and cease to resist the Kingdom of God being established in our souls. Let us fight with courage against the passions of our corrupt nature; and let us not listen to bad counsels, to dangerous suggestions, coming from the world and from the devil, who are the enemies of God. "Thy will be done on earth, as it is in Heaven." Let us love and seek what God wills, what God loves. Now, He wishes that we fulfill His holy law;

that we by renouncing ourselves, carry our cross with patience; that we advance in the way of perfection to which He calls us, and which leads to Heaven.

SEVENTH CONFERENCE

The "Our Father"

Fourth and Fifth Petitions

1. In the first three petitions of the Lord's Prayer we beg that God's Name may be blessed; that is to say, that God may be known, loved, served, and glorified by all men. We beg that the Kingdom of God may come; that truth, and the Church of Jesus Christ which is its guardian, may spread among all nations; that grace may reign in our hearts, and that we may all be received one day into the Kingdom of Heaven. We beg that His holy will may be done by all men with the same readiness, joy, and perfection, with which the angels and the blessed do it in Heaven.

And now we come to the consideration of the petitions of this divine prayer which concern ourselves especially. And first: "Give us this day our daily bread." This petition recalls the saying of holy David: "Lord, the eyes of all are turned to thee, and expect that

thou wilt give them their nourishment in due season."

But what do we petition by the words: "Give us this day our daily bread"?

We beg, first of all and especially, for all that is necessary for the maintenance of the life of our soul. For just as our body has need of a material nourishment, which sustains and keeps it in perfect health, so our soul has need of a supernatural, or as St. Matthew describes it, "our supersubstantial bread," which sustains and intensifies its spiritual life.

Again, we petition for our bodily food, vesture, lodging, health; in a word, all that is necessary for this world.

We beg for the nourishment of our soul. What is this nourishment? It is, first of all, sanctifying grace, that divine quality which penetrates into the substance of our soul and constitutes its supernatural life, nourishes it, and enables it to do works which merit Heaven.

This bread is, again, the word of God, which strengthens our soul, increases in it the love of virtue, and sustains it in the practice of good works. For, as our Lord said: "Not in bread alone doth man live, but in every word that cometh from the mouth of God."

This nourishment of the soul is, finally, and above all, the adorable Eucharist,—"the Living Bread come down from Heaven," which strengthens us to walk even to "the Mount of God." For our Lord assures us that "he who eateth of this Bread shall live for ever."

Behold, then, the different senses underlying the words we address to God. "Give us this day our daily bread." You pray God to sustain you in His holy grace; to enable you to hear His life-giving word with attention and good will; to grant you the happiness of receiving worthily and with pure and stainless hearts the Body and Blood of Jesus Christ, which are the pledge of eternal life. Again you beg from the bounty of God the bread which nourishes the body, the clothing which covers it, and all the other necessaries for the sustaining of this short life here below.

But did not God say to our first father, Adam, when he became a sinner: "Cursed be the earth in thy work. Thorns and thistles shall it bring forth to thee. In the sweat of thy face shalt thou eat bread"? Has the Son of God, then, abolished the law of labor? Far from it. God wishes us to labor; but He would have us acknowledge our dependence on His

bounty. He would have us understand that it is not we who make the grain grow. If God does not preserve the grain which you cast into the earth, it will be choked by weeds, or destroyed by the elements, or perish of blight. All our pains are usless, all our hopes vain, if God does not bless our labor. "Neither he who sows, nor he who waters is anything," says St. Paul. "It is God alone who giveth the increase." It is God who multiplies the grain and the fruit—the precious seed which your hands confide to the earth. We are to pray the Lord then to bless the work of our hands; but, at the same time, we must fly idleness. For, God opposes Himself to the idle, and He declares such are not worthy to eat the bread that nourishes them.

3. I would have you reflect on the words "bread" and "daily," and why He says "this day." Why does the Lord wish that we petition only for bread; and why, for our daily bread? It is because He would have us pray only for the strict necessities. For superfluity, besides being useless, is often dangerous. Where riches are found, there also reign vice, disorder, forgetfulness of God, and contempt of heavenly things. "Those who wish to become

rich," says St. Paul, "fall into temptation and into the snares of the devil." We beg not that God enable us to live in abundance and make good cheer, like that rich man spoken of in the Gospel, who was finally buried in hell. We ought to be the farther removed from wishing to live in abundance, as by such a life one consumes what belongs to others; to our brethren who languish in misery, and are a prey to the horrors of famine.

Moreover, it is not the bread for the year; the bread for the week; but the bread for each day that we ought to ask of God. This is because there is no day on which we have not need of aid, of the succors and blessings of Heaven. Each day we need nourishment. Each day the rich as well as the poor ought to pray for it. "It is not that the rich are in need of bread to sustain life," says St. John Chrysostom, "but it is in order that nourishment may come to them from the hand of God, and that they may receive from it a salutary virtue, which renders it useful to the body and subjects the body to the soul." You ought to petition only for your daily bread. For God wishes that you should know how to await to-morrow with confidence in His Divine Providence.

Will you be alive to-morrow? If so, then, just as to-day, God will be your Father.

Nor are we to take it that by this our Lord condemns all care for the future? No, certainly; but He condemns those excessive anxieties which cause one to have his attention and his looks, his mind and heart directed to the future. He condemns those who are always complaining of the hardness of the times, although they are in want of nothing, and who scarcely ever think of the poor, who are always in want.

II

1. But let us go on to the consideration of the fifth petition of the Lord's Prayer.

What do we petition God by the words: "Forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive them who trespass against us"? We beg the forgiveness of the offenses of which we have had the misfortune to render ourselves guilty towards our Heavenly Father. We beg the divine mercy to make enter into our souls the merits of the Passion and death of our amiable Saviour, in order that the stains of our sins be effaced.

But you know that God pardons only the

repentant sinner. Beg then, before all, the grace of repentance, a true contrition, which will lead you to the feet of the minister of Christ and aid you to lay in His bosom the avowal of your sins. Oh, pray for it with all humility; you will be heard, and God will enable you to receive from His bounty the kiss of reconciliation and peace.

However, pay attention to the words, "Forgive us, as we forgive." You wish to obtain from the bounty of God the grace of repentance and the happiness of seeing your sins effaced. God wishes it, too; but on condition that you forgive completely and sincerely, from all your heart, and without reserve, those who have offended you. The Holy Ghost speaks with indignation of the man who will not forgive: "A man nourishes his anger against another man, and he has the audacity to ask of God the remedy of his evils. He has not mercy for another man like himself, and he begs of God to pardon him his sins. He who is only flesh keeps up anger; and he asks mercy from God. Who will grant him the forgiveness of his sins? Mercy to him who shall have shown mercy." But if hatred, rancor, and re-

sentment are in your heart, God, who forgave even His murderers, will refuse to pardon you. "No forgiveness," he says, "no mercy for him who will not show mercy to his neighbor."

2. Unforgiving souls, what a frightful prayer is yours when you dare to say, "Forgive us, as we forgive." You do *not* forgive. Well, then, you condemn yourselves, and if at the moment of death rancor is still found in your heart, God will never forgive you.

Where reign the love of God and the neighbor, and the spirit of Christ, which is a spirit of sweetness and goodness, there reign peace and good will. Let us banish, then, from our hearts every sentiment of hatred and rancor. Let us forgive and remit the few pence that others owe us. Let us cease to see the evil that others have done us, and think of them no longer. When the remembrance presents itself to our mind, let us banish it. Let us forgive sincerely from our heart; then our Heavenly Father will forgive us the ten thousand talents we owe Him. He will blot out entirely our sins. He will annihilate them as if they had not been. "He will cast them behind his back," so that He may see them no longer, says the prophet.

He will receive us into the bosom of His mercy here, that He may gather us into the bosom of His glory in the paradise of His eternal delights.

EIGHTH CONFERENCE

The "Our Father"

Sixth and Seventh Petitions

I

1. We have petitioned from our God the material bread which is to sustain our life. We have besought our Heavenly Father to provide for our temporal wants; to give us lodging to shelter us; clothing to cover us. We have petitioned the bread of our souls, that is to say, the adorable Eucharist, which comes into our soul as the pledge of eternal life.

But sin resists the entrance of God into our hearts. This is why we lift our cry of repentance towards God and petition the grace of pardon, which is given us only if we ourselves pardon those who offend us.

Behold the significance of the two petitions of the "Our Father" which we explained in our last conference.

We now end the explanation of the prayer which our Lord taught us with the last two petitions.

When children have obtained from their father the pardon of their faults, what remains for them to do but to avoid the relapse into those faults, and by a wise, virtuous, irreproachable conduct to console the cherished father whom they had saddened? This is also what the Lord wishes us to do. We petitioned God to pardon our sins, and He granted it to us. He wishes now that we ask of Him the grace to fall no more. He wishes that we say to Him often: "Lead us not into temptation."

2. But what is the sense of the words which make up this sixth petition of the Lord's Prayer? Before replying I wish to show you the signification of the word,—temptation.

In the language of Holy Scripture the word "temptation" has two very different significations. In the first place, temptation signifies trial. God often puts temptation in this sense before men. Yes, often and in divers manners the Lord tries the virtue of His children, to see whether they truly love Him; whether they are truly devoted to Him with heart and soul.

It is not that God does not know both the secret affections and dispositions of each of us. For all is laid bare before Him, and "He sounds the heart and the reins." He knows the most hidden thoughts of our minds. He sees into the most profound depths of our soul. Why, then, does He wish those proofs? It is in order that the hearts of His servants and the virtues which adorn them may be known to other men, and revealed to the world.

Abraham and Sarah were old, yet God promised to His servant that he should have a son; that he would be the father of a numerous posterity; and He gives him Isaac, this child of benedictions. But this only son, upon whose head repose so many beautiful hopes, behold, the Sovereign Master commands the holy patriarch to immolate to Him. Abraham prepares to obey, when an angel arrests his arm. What more terrible trial than this? But without it we should never know that the faith of Abraham was so admirable, and his obedience so heroic. This is why God wished to try His servant.

To tempt signifies, in the second place, to lead to evil, to excite to sin, to urge one on to

his ruin. It is the property of the devil to tempt us in this manner. He tempts us to deceive and destroy us.

God will never make use of this kind of temptation. He does not wish it, He could not, He, the just, the holy one, who detests iniquity and those who commit it. That God tempts men in this way; that He is the author of sin; such a thought would be a horrible blasphemy. "Let no man, when he is tempted, say that it is God who tempts him. God tempts no man to do evil," says St. James.

3. "God is just, and his judgments are right"; yet He permits that you be tempted by the devil, by your concupiscence, by your passions. This is because temptation is often very advantageous to you. If you are tempted, it is to make you sensible of your weakness, to teach you how much you ought to despise yourself, and how little you can count on your own virtue. If you are tempted, it is because God wishes to force you to have recourse to Him who is your strength. He wishes you with the Psalmist to "lift up your eyes to heaven, whence you shall find salvation." If you are tempted, God permits it in order to purify you. For the Holy Ghost assures us that, as

fire tests and purifies gold, so temptation tests and purifies the just man. If God permits you to be tempted, it is to give you an opportunity to exercise and acquire virtues; for we can acquire them only by exercise, and we can never exercise them as well as in temptation.

Nevertheless, take care; we must not give in to temptation; and yet we shall consent to temptation, if grace come not to sustain us. For our frailty is very great.

It is this powerful help of grace that our Lord teaches us to beg of Him by the words: "Lead us not into temptation." We beg our Father who is in Heaven not to forsake us when temptation assails us. We pray Him to take us under His holy and powerful protection, and to arm us with His grace, that we may fight worthily the holy fight and gain the victory. We do not pray to be saved from temptation. This would be to ask the impossible. Servants of Jesus Christ, we must suffer as our Master; and Jesus our Master willed to be tempted. The enemy of God persecutes you with fury. It is a good sign. It is a sign that you belong to God. It is because there is perhaps in your soul the glorious character of His election. "Blessed," says the Holy Spirit,

"blessed is the man who suffers temptation and evils with patience; because, when his virtue shall have been proved, he shall receive the crown of life, which God has prepared for those who love Him." Resist temptation; you render yourself rich for Heaven.

II

1. In order not to succumb to temptation, is it sufficient to pray? No, Christ tells us that we must also "watch." That is to say, you ought to separate yourselves from, and fly with care all that leads you into temptation and sin, and guard yourself carefully, lest the devil surprise you.

People often complain of the enemy of their salvation; and in the meantime they open to him all the gates of their soul. He will cease to be dangerous if he has to roar outside. We know that the enemy of our salvation is strong only through our temerity, and that our temerity brings on our greatest weakness. To expose yourself willfully to sin, is to sin. Will your prayer, then, perhaps be heard? You go boldly and with a light heart on the brink of the precipice, and then you say to God: "Lord, prevent me from falling." You walk willfully

on burning coals and say: "Prevent me from being burned." But what does the Scripture say? "He who loves the danger, shall perish in it." Watch, therefore, and pray, and help will come to you from on high. "The just have cried to the Lord, and the Lord has heard them, and he has delivered them from their tribulation." This is what we beg of God in the last petition of the "Our Father": "But deliver us from evil."

2. How good is Our Lord? What breadth does He not give to this prayer! This petition embraces in some sort all the others; in fact, we here beg for the deliverance from all evils, whether they belong to this world or the next. We beg that God preserve us from a sudden and unprovided death; from the chastisements that await the impenitent sinner in hell; from the fire which purifies the souls in Purgatory; we ask to be preserved from water, fire, thunder, hail, seditions, wars. We beg Him to remove from us all maladies, ravages, snares, treasons. We beg, finally, that riches, honors, health, life itself, may not be for us a source of sin or misfortune, and work the ruin of our souls.

3. "Amen." May it be done as I have said.

May all our petitions be granted to us. We believe that it will be so; we hope so. Amen.

Behold how you end the Lord's Prayer! We ought to pronounce this conclusion with special piety and sincerity, both in order to supply for the defects of attention and fervor which we may have been guilty of in the rest of the prayer, and in order to make a last effort and to strike a last blow to touch the heart of our Heavenly Father.

Such is the prayer taught us by Our Lord. Nothing could be more holy, more touching, more august, more efficacious. It is the prayer of Jesus Christ, and in the words which we pronounce, Our Father, who is the Father of our Saviour, recognizes the words of His only Son, who is made the Victim of atonement for our sins in obedience to Him.

When we say holily, "Our Father," God will hear us; for the Son of God, who dwells in our hearts, will be upon our lips, and can God resist the prayer of Jesus Christ, His Son? The Lord's Prayer is the golden key with which we can open for ourselves all the treasures of Heaven. Let all, then, love it, venerate it, attach themselves to it as to the most precious good, and make frequent use of it. For I

fear not to promise to those who shall recite this beautiful prayer as God wishes and commands, that is to say, with heart and soul, that they will obtain the things that are necessary for them in this life, and that they will one day be put in possession of the treasures of a happy eternity.

NINTH CONFERENCE

The Rosary (I)

The Vocal Element

1. One of the reproaches most frequently uttered against the piety of modern times is, that its votaries are addicted to the recitation of endless forms of shallow and sentimental prayer, while at the same time the more solid and approved forms of prayer come down to us from the ages of faith and commended to us from an inspired origin are lost sight of and neglected. Moreover, the subjects that appeal to our higher nature and are calculated to move us to the practices of the more perfect life, are left unstudied; and hence, after a long life given over to such practices of piety as are put before them, souls are found as imperfect and worldly as they were on the first day of their conversion.

We are told that prayer is an elevation of the soul to God. This means that in prayer

there takes place an interchange of thought and affection between it and its Creator. And if this be so, why, then, the simpler the form of prayer, the fewer the words uttered, the more sublime and perfect the exercise. Intimate associates in their intercourse with one another; children in their conversation with their parents, give little thought to the formulas in which they express themselves. The most delightful hours are those that are spent in the interchange of love, where heart speaks to heart without the intervention of forms of words and solely by the silent play of the emotions so well understood and felt by those who are truly in love with one another. Nay, and the deepest emotions of the soul are those that words are powerless to express. All this I say as an introduction to the study of one of the most sublime forms of prayer come down to us from the ages of faith, and with the entire approval and commendation of the Church, —I mean the prayer of the Rosary.

2. Let me speak to you of the excellence of this form of prayer to-day. I say that nothing can be more excellent as a method of prayer than the Rosary, whether we consider it as to the one or to the other of its essential elements;

namely, as to the vocal prayers of which it is made up, or as to the meditation on the principal mysteries of our Redemption, which is made during the recital of the vocal prayers. Let me, first of all, take up the consideration of the former of those elements.

The prayers of which the Rosary is made up are excellent on whatever side we look at them, be it their simplicity, or their origin, or their signification, or even their repetition.

Their simplicity cannot be doubted. Its founder chose for the matter of the Rosary the simplest prayers, those that the little child learns on the knees of its mother, those that the illiterate can learn without pain, those that remain in a man's memory, even after he has trampled every other practice of religion underfoot.

But whence do those prayers originate? Have those prayers, so simple, been composed by a man in a moment of fervor? No; they have come to us from the mouth of God Himself.

One day He who is called in Heaven "the Word," and whom, clothed in mortal flesh, we look up to as our Redeemer, was seated on the side of a road. Around Him pressed a crowd of

the poor, the infirm, the ignorant. Extending His hand towards them, He said: "My dear little children, when you pray, do not as the pagans, who put all their confidence in a multitude of words; who fancy they will be heard because of the number of things they say. But when you pray, say simply: 'Our Father who art in Heaven' "; and the rest, as you know it so well. The rest of the prayers have not been taught us by Jesus Christ, but God inspired them to the angel and to the Church, and they surpass by their excellence all effusions of the mind and heart of man.

3. But penetrate under the rind of the words that bloom upon your lips. Penetrate the signification of the prayers of the Rosary, and you will see their excellence and deep meaning.

When you call God your Father, what do you do? Do you not confess the great dogmas of the creation and of the brotherhood of the human race? You say, "Father," to show your relation to Him, and you say, "Our Father," to show that you are in charity with all your brethren. You add, "Who art in Heaven," to confess your hope of one day arriving there.

When you say, "Hallowed be Thy Name,"

do you not confess His holiness? And when you demand His kingdom, do you not confess the dogma of His sovereign royalty? That Kingdom refers to the law of grace which He has established in your soul; to the holy Church, founded by Him, over which His zealous Providence has watched from the beginning; but, above all, to His glorious reign over the beatified, amongst whom we hope to share happiness for eternity.

When you petition that His will be done, do you not confess the dogma of His government over individuals and over all peoples—over that which is and that which will be; that He is the Master of space, and time, and all things? When you ask of Him your daily bread, do you not confess the dogma of His Providence? You petition Him for the food which nourishes the body; for sustenance, for raiment, for lodging; for all those things that are necessary for your existence here below; for grace, which is the nourishment of the soul; but especially for the supersubstantial food of the Holy Eucharist, in which Jesus Christ feeds us with His own most precious Body and Blood.

When you ask the pardon of your sins, do you not confess the dogma of mercy? And when you ask God to deliver you from evil, do you not confess the dogma of grace?

4. When you say, "Mary, full of grace"; do you not confess her dignity? When you say, "Blessed art thou among women," do you not confess her privileges? When you bless the "Fruit of her womb," do you not confess the dogma of the Divine Maternity and the dogma of the Incarnation of the Word of God? When you say, "Mother of God," do you not address her by the most glorious of her titles, and when you ask the succor of her prayers in life and in death, do you not confess the dogma of her intercession in Heaven with her Son, and through her Son, with His Divine Father?

When you proclaim, "Glory be to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Ghost," do you not join the angelic throng in their adorations of the Blessed Trinity? And when you repeat the words of the Rosary again and again, do you not insist on these affirmations? do you not anchor them, so to speak, in your soul; so that it must needs be that one day or another they will break forth by your mouth,

and in your acts, and in your conduct; for the Christian cannot shut up in his heart the mystery of his beliefs.

Moreover, once we are happy in the possession of the formularies of our faith, we are delivered from all perplexity, from all incertitude as to our relations with God, and as to our eternal end, and there is given us the best nourishment of our faith.

5. We repeat the words, not ten times, not fifty times, but a hundred and fifty times. But to what effect?

In order to fulfill the second condition to which Jesus Christ has attached the efficacy of prayer, He has said that God will hear only the humble and persevering prayer—the humble prayer; that is, the prayer of the little one —the persevering prayer; that is, of one who is not wearied.

I ask: in the prayer of the Rosary, what do we do if not repeat the self-same petitions, even till we obtain them? Look at the little child that desires an object. The mother refuses to give it to him. The child replies: "Mother, I long to have it." The mother does not answer. The child importunes: "Mother, give it to me." The mother says: "Let me alone." But the

child does not give up. He holds out his hand till he gets the coveted object. So it is in the prayer of the Rosary. We repeat our requests of God till we get them.

We imitate in it, moreover, the prayer of Jesus Christ in His agony. He addresses Himself to His Father only by groans and lamentations, saying always the self-same words.

Oh, prayer suppliant; prayer universal: prayer divine in its origin; in its simplicity; magnificent in its signification! Prayer, humble, persevering, amorous, all conquering! Behold, what is the vocal element of the Rosary.

TENTH CONFERENCE

The Rosary (II)

The Joyful, the Sorrowful, and the Glorious Mysteries

I

In my former discourse I treated of the excellence of the Rosary as regards its vocal element, or the prayers it is made up of.

With your forbearance I will again return to the exposition of that excellence, which I will now prove from the mental element, that is, from the meditation on its mysteries. Nothing seems to me grander or more salutary in the way of prayer than this mental element of the Rosary.

Without doubt the prayer of the lips is good; but it is but the lower step of that mysterious ladder by which we mount towards God, in order to unite ourselves to Him.

Above the prayer that speaks there is the

prayer that thinks, that contemplates; the prayer that employs words as a support, even as the bird uses the flexible branch and its oscillations to take its flight towards heaven. Such is the Rosary. In it the soul contemplates the chief mysteries of our religion, and these mysteries the Church has arranged in three orders —the Joyful, the Sorrowful, and the Glorious Mysteries.

And, first, the Message of the Angel, the Incarnation of the Divine Word, and the first maternal transports of the purest of women. Then, the Visit of Mary to Elizabeth, that of the Saviour to His precursor. The Mystery of the Birth of Jesus Christ in Bethlehem, the maternal joys of Mary, the Presentation of Jesus in the Temple; the first revelation of His greatness to the heart of the true Jerusalem, the Finding in the Temple.

2. After joy comes sorrow, for of this is life made up: some joyful days, and then, the clouds; the storms, suffering and sadness. And, as Jesus Christ wished to represent human life in His own and that of His Blessed Mother, so after joy for them comes sorrow.

In these Mysteries the soul contemplates the prayer in the Garden of Olives; the agony

and dark presentiment of Mary; the scourging, each blow of which falls on the heart of His Mother, and leaves there a bloody mark; the crowning with thorns, and the tears of Mary, the carrying of the Cross, Mary broken at the sad spectacle; the Crucifixion and death of Jesus Christ; and the deep sorrow that descends from the heart of the Crucified on the heart of His Mother, overwhelmed with tears.

3. Lastly, there are the Glorious Mysteries. As after joy comes sorrow; so after sorrow, glory, triumphant glory, the reward of grief. Sorrow is the great combat of human life, and glory is the reward of combat.

Behold the lesson of the Rosary. There are the triumphant Resurrection from the tomb and the appearance of Jesus to His Mother. There are the Mysteries of the Ascension and the Descent of the Holy Ghost, of the Assumption of the Virgin, received amid the acclamations of the celestial court, and her Coronation in Heaven by the King of Glory.

Behold, dearly beloved, the principal mysteries of Christianity! You have often heard them mentioned. You have read them in the Gospels of the Sundays. And you have, without doubt, run over them many a time. You

know them; but do you meditate on them? Do you make them in some sort enter into your soul? Do you receive the mysterious impressions of them? Do you live by those Mysteries which are the aliment of the Christian life? Are you permeated with them? And are the lives of Jesus and Mary the model and the type of your life?

If not, then take into your hand this chaplet of the Rosary. While your lips will be unceasingly occupied with holy words, you will follow in these mysterious regions the appearances of Jesus and His Mother, who present themselves to you in the virtues and privileges of their life.

II

1. It develops in us the supernatural life. Our body has need of nourishment, which it assumes and which renews its vigor. Our soul also has need of nourishment to live the supernatural life and so develop the fundamental virtues which have been infused into it in Baptism: faith, hope, and charity.

We need to see the things of God; to approach the things of God; to be penetrated through and through with the things of God.

We must know Jesus Christ: seize Him; embrace Him; become attached to Him; for this, He says, "is eternal life"; *i. e.,* the principle from which eventuates eternal life.

How will the soul become attached to Jesus Christ, if it does not see Him; if it lives not in His familiarity? You will not know Jesus Christ, if you do not make Him approach to you; if you have Him not unceasingly before your eyes; if you consider Him not in His mortal flesh, living for you and dying for you on the cross; if you roll not back the stone of sensible things under which He lies, and make Him live again before you by a vivid meditation on the mysteries of His mortal life. And all this you do by meditating on the mysteries of the Rosary.

2. To awaken Jesus Christ to a vivid life, there is no need to tap at the door of the tabernacle. When I enter the church, I close my eyes; I join my hands; I recollect myself; and I run over in memory the sacred way traveled by the Son of God. I see Him descend into the sombre depths of the deep sea of our humanity, taking as a covering the veil of our flesh. I see Him in the Stable of Bethlehem; in the arms of His Mother; in the House of Naza-

reth; in His public life. I see Him in the Garden of Olives, covered with a bloody sweat. I hear during the night the blows fall on His sacred Body, which cause a river of Blood to flow for me.

I see, O my God, Your crown of thorns, Your adorable Face soiled with blood and spittle, Your Body bent under the weight of the Cross. I see You upon Calvary extend Your arms over the world as if to embrace it. I see You in the tomb. Then, traversing the heavenly hierarchies, I see You seat yourself at the right hand of Your Father. I see Your Mother crowned with glory. Behold what the Rosary gives me!

Is it possible that familiarity with these mysteries leaves me cold and determines me not to practise the virtues of which I have contemplated so long the example? Will not faith be deepened in my soul at the contemplation of those mysteries? Will not my hope be increased when I see this river of Blood flow upon the Cross for my iniquities? Will not my charity be increased when I recall that Jesus Christ has so loved me and has suffered so much for me? Thus the devotees of the Rosary, when contemplating Jesus and Mary in the

mysteries, feel grow within them the virtues of faith, hope, and charity.

Oh, contemplate these mysteries, not once or often, but every day, and many times a day. Accustom yourself to reflect frequently on one or other of them as suggested to you by the recitation of the Rosary. You will thus become familiar with the deep mystery underlying the earthly existence of the Son of God. Jesus and Mary will become your companions in life; your strong helpers in time of affliction and trial; your models in the practice of virtue; in a word, your salvation and sanctification in this life, and your strong hope of salvation in the life to come.

ELEVENTH CONFERENCE

The Rosary, its Excellence as Shown from Various Considerations

I

1. I have shown you the excellence of the Rosary as a method of prayer. I have pointed out to you the excellence of the prayers of which it is made up. I have shown you the holiness of the mysteries it teaches you to reflect on, and how that reflection strengthens in you the virtues of faith, hope, and charity. Let me in this discourse treat of the excellence of the same mental element coming from other considerations. And, first, the mysteries of the Rosary, joyful, sorrowful, and glorious, respond to the phases of the spiritual life as experienced by each one of us; to infancy, or the period which belongs to beginners; to adolescence or progression; to the perfect state, or the consummation of the spiritual life. To infancy: when a soul is called by the goodness of

God and visited by the graces of the Saviour, and when she has had the happiness of giving herself to Him, He showers on her joys and caresses. He treats that soul as a mother treats her little child. This is the first phase of the spiritual life. But afterwards, when the soul has become strong by the access of grace and the practice of virtue, God proves her fidelity, and to the first joy succeeds sorrow. But not even this is the ultimate state of the religious soul; for after sorrow, when she has suffered well, when God has torn her heart, He makes her feel the delights of innocence. He draws the soul to Himself even till He loads her with glory.

In the meditation on the mysteries of the Rosary we learn how to conduct ourselves in joy, in sorrow, and in glory. In the joy of the soul, when we are happy, the meditation on the joyful mysteries will teach us not to rest in the happiness of a day, but to offer it to God and to rejoice in God and for God, and to expect that at a given moment, which will not delay, sorrow will arrive.

Again, the meditation on the sorrowful mysteries will teach us to bear suffering even to heroism for God's sake.

In glory we shall learn how to conduct ourselves through meditating on the Glorious Mysteries, by despising human glory and greatness and by recalling the greatness and glory that are reserved for us in Heaven. We shall recall still another thing, namely, that Jesus Christ has been made great, and that He has made His Mother great, only by being generous in regard to us, and that after His example we ought to be generous also.

II

Again, the meditation on the mysteries of the Rosary teaches us to combat our vices. They are well known to you. They are sensuality, the love of earthly goods, and pride; and they are found at the bottom of every human heart. Pride is the root of a multitude of excesses, and it is combated by the Incarnation of the Word of God, who preaches humility to us. For He took the form of a servant, and chose a creature for Mother. He submitted to the laws of humanity, and He was made obedient, even to the death of the Cross.

The Rosary combats sensuality, because it preaches mortification in all the sorrows of Jesus Christ and His blessed Mother; and

who could be a sensualist if he reflects often that he professes to be a follower of the Crucified? The Rosary combats the poison of cupidity for earthly goods, because Jesus Christ was made poor, and remained poor. In His public life He had not a pillow on which to lay His head. He died naked on the cross, and He had to be buried in a stranger's tomb. We see all this, and we meditate on all this in the Rosary, and as a consequence, we learn to detach ourselves from earthly goods and to attach ourselves to heavenly ones. Behold the excellence of meditation on the mysteries of the Rosary. Let us not stop, therefore, at the letter or the word, the vocal element; but let us penetrate to the living part, the mental. The external part is but as the covering of flesh and bones which God has thrown over the mysteries of His interior life.

III

In speaking on the prayers and meditations and the origin of the Rosary, I have spoken of its effects; because such a devotion of necessity raises us to the perfection of prayer; because it unites us interiorly to Jesus Christ

and His Mother; because it approaches near to God and draws from Him many graces.

I will only add a few words more. The Rosary promotes more than any other devotion the glory of God; and more than any other devotion, it procures us the graces we stand in need of. This prayer procures the glory of God, of the august Trinity, so many times invoked and so many times saluted and adored, and in the confession of that fundamental dogma by the words: "Glory be to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Ghost." It procures the glory of Jesus Christ, saluted as Redeemer, the model and the type of creatures. It procures the glory of the Blessed Virgin, who is admired so often in its mysteries for her virtues and privileges.

And as to ourselves, the Rosary contains a multitude of mysterious graces, which God sends into our souls. There are, moreover, graces determined by the Church and indulgences without number attached to the prayers of the Rosary. It procures the graces of succor and consolation in our need; of help for Christians who combat their passions; for generous Christians who sustain the cause of God upon

the field of battle; graces of help and consolation for the Church, attacked unceasingly by her enemies; graces for the conversion of sinners. Oh, it is for them, above all, that the Rosary was instituted. With this weapon of peace St. Dominic triumphed over the Albigenses, and brought about their conversion in spite of their depraved obstinacy. With it innumerable souls were snatched by pious relatives from the jaws of hell when all other help seemed to fail. Practise it, then, all your lives, and be insistent in its practice, that you may know by your own experience its excellence as a method of prayer and a means for the attainment of all good.

TWELFTH CONFERENCE

The Divine Office (I)

1. We are told in the Book of Exodus that when Moses fed the sheep of Jethro, his father-in-law in the inner parts of the desert, the Lord appeared to him in a flame of fire out of the midst of a bush. And he saw that the bush was on fire and was not burnt, and he said: "I will go and see this great sight, why the bush is not burnt." And when the Lord saw that Moses went forward to see, He called to him out of the midst of the bush and said: "Moses, Moses . . . come not nigh hither. Put off the shoes from thy feet, for the place whereon thou standest is holy ground!

"And Moses," continues the text, "hid his face, and durst not look at God." (Ex. iii, 1–6.)

The fathers of the Church see in this manifestation of the Godhead and the consequent action of Moses a symbol of the public wor-

ship rendered to God by means of the Divine Office and the other sacred ceremonies of the Church.

Now it is of the chanting, or of the recitation of the Divine Office, of its dignity and worth, that I purpose treating in this conference. As to the dignity and worth, they are patent when we remember that it is the public prayer of the Church, and the return of thanksgiving and adoration paid to God for the rich endowments of grace and sanctity that He has lavished on her. It is the "sweet smelling spikenard" which the spouse pours forth continually in the presence of the Beloved; "the storeroom" of mysteries and delights into which "the King Himself has brought us"; "the cellar of wine" into which He has introduced us that He may "set in order charity within us." As such the chant or the recitation of the Divine Office is, after the celebration of the Mass, and the administration of the Sacraments, the holiest thing in the life of the Church and the most sanctifying agency given by a bountiful and all-merciful God to man.

2. And if we would review the principal epochs in the organization of the public prayer of the Church, I would show you, first of all,

the great leader of the Israelites by the shores of the Red Sea lifting up his voice, and, with the whole people, to the accompaniment of timbrel and psaltery and harp, chanting that magnificent hymn of triumph and praise and thanksgiving to God for the victory over their enemies. "Let us sing to the Lord, for He is gloriously magnified; the horse and the rider He hath thrown into the sea. The Lord is my strength and my praise; and He is become salvation to me. He is my God and I will glorify Him; the God of my fathers, and I will exalt Him," etc. (Exod. xv, *passim.*)

And later on, when more prosperous days came upon the people of God, and peace and plenty abounded within their borders, and their enemies on every side were scattered, we see the Royal Prophet "clothed in fine linen and girded with an ephod, and with him seven choirs of singing men playing on all manner of instruments made of wood, on harps, and lutes, and timbrels, and cornets, and cymbals, dancing with all his might before the Lord." (2 Kings vi.)

"And after that the ark of the covenant was set up in the city of David, he appointed Levites to minister before the ark of the Lord,

and to remember His works, and to glorify and praise the Lord, God of Israel.

"And he arranged the priests in their courses to carry on the solemn worship of God before the ark, Asaph the chief, and next after him, Zacharias, and the singers, Heman and Asaph and Ethau, sounded with cymbals of brass. And Zacharias and his brethren sung mysteries upon psalteries. And Chonenias, chief of the Levites, presided over the prophecies and gave out the tunes. And on that day David made Asaph and the chiefs to give praise to the Lord with his brethren. 'Praise ye the Lord and call upon his name; make known his doings among the nations. Sing to him, yea, sing praises to him, and relate all his wondrous works." (1 Par. xv, xvi.)

Thus was organized the celebration of public worship in Jerusalem before the ark of the covenant. And in the cities allotted to the Levites, and to the priests, and in the cities of refuge, and throughout all the territories of the tribes, on Sabbath days and festivals were sung the praises of the Most High, and all the land became resonant with the sound of psaltery and song.

3. But sad days came upon the Jews, and

they were carried into captivity. And "upon the rivers of Babylon there they sat and wept when they remembered Sion; on the willows in the midst thereof, they hung up their instruments. And they that carried them away, said: Sing ye to us a hymn of the songs of Sion. How shall we sing the song of the Lord in a strange land? If we forget thee, O Jerusalem, let our right hand be forgotten; let our tongue cleave to our jaws if we remember not thee, if we make not Jerusalem the beginning of our joy." (Ps. 136.)

And hence it was that at the return from captivity, under Esdras and Nehemias, one of the first acts of the reëstablishment was to gather together the remnant of the sons of Levi, and to set up again the courses among the priests, who should in turn minister at the altar and chant once more the praises of their God. Thus it continued throughout the Kingdom of Juda in the succeeding centuries down to the time of our Lord.

And when the Saviour was yet a boy, we can well believe that He took an active part in the solemn worship that was offered in the synagogue of His native city of Nazareth. And, oh, with what holy dispositions, and with

what a reverential mien, we can well surmise. Thus also He took occasion frequently during His public mission to join in the worship of the Jews, and to expound to them the spiritual meaning of the Scriptures, and how the events of their past history prefigured those that were taking place before their very eyes.

Thus also it was that the Apostles, carrying on the tradition received from the Master, trained the young churches in the chanting of the psalms.

To this custom the Apostle alludes in his Epistle to the Colossians, where he says: "Exhort one another with psalms and hymns and spiritual canticles, singing in your hearts with edification the praises of the Lord." (Col. iii, 16.)

These words show us that the recitation and the chanting of the psalms were the ordinary occupation of the first Christians. They were their chaste delight and the artifice they employed to soften the miseries of their pilgrimage and to prepare themselves for persecution and martyrdom.

And when, at the end of the fifth century, St. Jerome translated the Psalter from the original Hebrew, the reigning Pope, St. Gela-

sius, did not think it well to introduce the new and more correct version among the people, accustomed as they were from Apostolic times to join in the Church's public prayer; and so we have the text of the old Italic version of the Psalms left unpurged in the chant of the Church down to the present day.

THIRTEENTH CONFERENCE

The Divine Office (II)

I

1. But, alas! how has not charity grown cold among men! The Sacred Psalmody has almost ceased except among the religious and the clergy, for whom the Church has made it an obligation and a law. She has selected and deputed us in the name of all her children to carry on the public worship of God. And this should make us all the more zealous and faithful in the discharge of this sacred function, feeling that the honor of our *Alma Mater* is entrusted to us.

Alas! also, through the misery of the times in which we live, even the number of those choristers of the Church is greatly diminished; shall I say, in some places they have entirely disappeared. *"Senes defecerunt in portis: juvenes in choro canentium"* ("The old men have disappeared at the gates; the young men

in the choirs of singers.") Have I not had the grief to witness the stalls of those great choral churches of San Domenico, in Bologna; of Santa Maria Novella and St. Mark's in Florence; of San Domenico in Siena; of Santa Maria della Grazia, and San Eustorgio, in Milan; of San Domenico in Fiesole; the great Dominican church in Viterbo; and Santa Sabina in Rome; the Mother Church of the Order, Saint Jacques, in Paris; Los Domenicos and Corpo Santo, in Lisbon; and La Bathalia of the Plains; and San Carlo of Aveiro; and many others, to speak only of our own Order, —stalls which were formerly peopled by scores, nay, in some cases by hundreds of choristers, now almost deserted, with only three or four guardians of the convents left to carry on the sacred functions? All the rest have been taken away as a result of confiscation, and expulsion, and military service to the state. Thus it is, in what were before now, and up to recent times, great Catholic countries: France, Italy, Portugal, Mexico, the greater number of the South American republics, the priests and the religious have been expelled through the diabolical agencies of Freemasonry and kindred secret societies.

2. It thus remains for us to continue in our generation, though in a less solemn manner, the public worship of the Church, and to make up by our zeal and piety for the diminished numbers of those devoted to her choral service.

And if we are true in the fulfillment of this, one of the primary duties of religion, we may trust that God will make fruitful our labors and use us as the instruments of the sanctification of numberless souls; yes, I say, of numberless souls, for who is the priest that sanctifies his flock? Is it the brusque, bustling priest who is always occupied with the external duties of his parish, the clever financier and man of affairs? Is it the learned pedant who is abreast of all the latest achievements of scientists and can talk learnedly on every kind of subject? Is it the society man who spends his spare time at play or in the company of worldlings? No, not these are the choice instruments God makes use of to work great fruit in souls; but ones who, like that marvel of the past generation, the venerable Curé of Ars, are wholly devoted to a life of prayer, and who are seen with the beads or the breviary ever in their hands, and who spend long hours in prayer before the tabernacle.

II

1. Since, then, it is by our mouths that the faithful acquit themselves of this duty, let us perform it in a manner to excite their piety, and worthy of the sublime function we discharge.

And, to begin with, let us bring our thoughts into harmony with the lovely invocation put into our mouths each morning as we commence the sacred Office of the day, *"Aperi, Domine, os meum ad benedicendum nomen sanctum tuum"* ("Open thou my mouth, O Lord, to bless Thy Holy Name"). Yes, for in the words of the psalm: "our heart and our flesh must exult in the living God." The invocation continues: *"Munda cor meum ab omnibus vanis, perversis, et alienis cogitationibus"* ("Cleanse Thou my heart from all vain, perverse, and worldly thoughts").

As Moses of old, when he would go forth to worship the God of his fathers in the desert, was ordered "to put the sandals from off his feet, for the place whereon he trod was holy ground," so must we, when we would set ourselves to recite the prayer of the Church, lay aside all worldly thoughts and concerns, and

marshal all our faculties for the due performance of the divine act we purpose to discharge.

"Intellectum illumina, affectum inflamma" ("enlighten my intellect and kindle my affections, so that I may be able to recite this office worthily, attentively, and devoutly, and so merit to be heard in the sight of Thy Divine Majesty"). Aye, *"digne, attente ac devote."* Oh, how much there is contained in those select words; *"digne"*—"in a becoming manner," which has reference as well to the attitude of the body as to the reverential disposition of the soul. *"Digne,"* in a manner worthy of the majesty of God whom I adore, as of the Church whose worship I am delegated to offer. *"Digne"*—"not running over or mumbling the sacred words," says St. Bernard; observing punctiliously the pauses directed by the Church; performing also those acts of bodily reverence prescribed, and which are an imitation and an approximation of the reverential attitude of the worshippers of the Heavenly Jerusalem. *"Digne,"*—we must chant with a modesty and an earnestness which will impress respect on all those who assist, taking a tone of voice natural and without affectation, regulating our exterior so well that there will be

nothing in us which will not respond to the holiness of the place where we are, and to the angelic function we discharge.

2. *"Attente,"* giving all the attention proper to the august services we are offering, that attention being given to the proper pronunciation of the sacred words, or *material attention* as it is called; or, to the sense of the words spoken, which is called *literal attention;* or, finally, and the most perfect of all, *spiritual attention,* or attention to the action of prayer we are performing, mind and heart being engaged with the divine presence that condescends to hold intercourse with us.

3. *"Ac devote,"* as absorbed in the sacred work of prayer. We must chant with mind and heart more than with our mouth. *"Psallam spiritu, psallam et mente,"* says St. Paul. (1 Cor. xv, 16.) "I will sing in the spirit, I will sing also in the understanding"; not looking so much to the sound, how it may fall upon the ear, as to the illumination of the heart," says St. Augustine. "We must entertain ourselves with holy thoughts, or enter into the admirable sense of the words which is enclosed in the psalms." "If the psalm prays," says he, "pray; if it weeps, weep; if it rejoices, rejoice; if it

hopes, hope; if it expresses fear, fear; for all that is here written is mirrored in the soul."

4. And, lastly, we sanctify our whole act of worship by uniting it with the worship of Jesus Christ, through union with whose prayer alone all our acts of worship are sanctified and made acceptable to God. *"Domine, in unione illius divinae intentionis qua ipse in terris laudes Deo persolvisti, has tibi horas persolvo."* Oh, yes, let us unite our prayer of the Divine Office with that divine prayer of the Saviour as He prayed on the mountain top, or in the Garden of Gethsemani, or on the Cross. There shall we find the divine model of all profitable prayer. Let us offer it as an act of reparation to God for all the outrages He receives from sinners, as the words of David are put in our mouth: *"Non mortui laudabunt Te Domine."* (Ps. lxiii, 17, 18.) "The dead shall not praise Thee, O Lord; nor any of them that go down to hell. But we that live, bless the Lord: from this time, now, and for ever."

My God, I regret and am filled with confusion at the faults I have committed in the chanting of the prayers of the Church. I am aware that we chant in the society of the angels. I know that Thou are there present, and I am

not ignorant of the reward Thou hast promised to those who acquit themselves worthily of this duty. Grant me the grace that I may faithfully fulfill hereafter this function in so holy a manner that it will be for the advancement of Thy glory, edifying to the people, and advantageous to myself; that so I may have the happiness to commence in time what I hope to continue with the saints for all eternity. "*Repleatur os meum laude, ut cantem gloriam tuam tota die, magnitudinem tuam.*" (Ps. 70, 8.) "Let my mouth be filled with praise, that I may sing Thy glory, Thy greatness, all the day long."

SECOND PART

The Illuminative Way—Continued

FIRST CONFERENCE

Mental Prayer

I

1. Among the means given us for our sanctification there is none more worthy of our life-long care and practice than mental prayer. It is a means commended to us by all spiritual writers, and employed universally and with ardor by souls striving for perfection.

To this great help placed in our hands by God I would direct your attention to-day. And as it is a great and comprehensive subject, embracing many parts and vastly important considerations, I shall have to treat upon it largely in other conferences to come.

Let me premise that there are two kinds of prayer, vocal and mental. Vocal prayer is that which we address to God with our lips. Mental

prayer is that which we employ when we commune with God in silent worship.

It is not that in vocal prayer we give to God mere lip service, prayer in which the mind has no part; but it is so called in order to distinguish it from mental prayer, the prayer of the heart alone.

As vocal prayer is necessary for all, so mental prayer is necessary for those who make profession of certain states. It is necessary for religious, whether men or women, for clerics, for priests, for all those who are called to a life of perfection. And when I say that mental prayer is necessary, I do not mean what is understood as *"ad melius esse,"* but *absolutely.* Necessary *"ad melius esse"* means, according to theologians, "for the better performance of." St. Thomas gives the example of one who uses a horse for the performance of a journey. The same journey could be performed on foot, but it is done more easily and expeditiously on horseback. Well, mental prayer is necessary for persons professing the states I have mentioned, not merely *"ad melius esse,"* but absolutely. And the reason is, because of the higher perfection to which persons professing those states are called, and

of the more generous sacrifices demanded of them.

People in the world are saved through the observance of the Commandments, and they are not ordinarily called to the practice of very high virtue; hence, vocal prayer well made puts them in the disposition to discharge their obligations efficiently. But the observance of the Commandments will not satisfy for us, religious and priests. Addressing specially the former I say, we are called to the practice of perfection; to the observance of the counsels; to the renouncement of our own wills; to the practice of religious poverty; to the observance of angelic chastity; to obedience to superiors; to the observance of strict rules. We are liable to be sent to the ends of the earth at a moment's notice; to be given repugnant charges; to be put into the society of unsocial companions. We are to be the servants of all mankind. We are bound, I say, to tend constantly to perfection. Well, for the acquirement of these dispositions mental prayer is necessary. And as well might you expect an untrained countryman from the fields to understand and execute efficiently the orders of a military commander, as to expect one who

neglects mental prayer to be in the disposition to execute those duties that obedience and the other obligations of his state call on him to perform.

2. Nor are we to think that mental prayer is a modern practice. It existed always, and enters into the essence of the interior life. True, in modern times, and chiefly through the influence of Jesuit methods in the practice of prayer, elaborate rules for mental prayer have been drawn up for the guidance of those who aspire to a perfect life. But the practice of mental prayer existed always, and is a necessity of the interior life. Hence we see the practice of mental prayer joined to that of vocal prayer by our Holy Father, St. Dominic, in the Rosary. Hence do we see such a wonderful insight into the sense of Scripture in the spiritual writers of the early and middle ages of the Church. What are the writings of a St. Bernard, a St. Thomas, a St. Bonaventure, and many of the Fathers of the Church, but an unbroken chain of sentences of Holy Scripture in which the deep spiritual sense of the inspired writings is brought out? And this spiritual sense they could attain to only by a lifelong meditation on the sacred Word.

3. And what perfection of disposition is there that the faithful practice of mental prayer will not induce in us? Can one that is cold and wet stand before a furnace and not be made dry and warm? And, so, can one remain in the presence of God by meditation, and remain cold in love, damp in affection, unenlightened in mind? For is not God "a consuming fire"—a fire that by His presence warms, illuminates, and purifies? When, therefore, we approach Him in meditation, our minds must of necessity become enlightened, our hearts warmed, our will made pliant, our affections chastened and dissolved in love, even as incense placed in the burning censer is dissolved and sends forth a sweet perfume before God.

In vocal prayer we speak to God, we give utterance to the fervent accents of the saints, we repeat their inspired words of praise. In meditation we do all this; but this is not all; for, God speaks to us! He warms our hearts! He enlightens our minds! He perfects our wills and prepares them for the most heroic acts of self-sacrifice and love! He impresses on them a divine charity and dispenses in them the principles of the supernatural life!

And is not this what David spoke in the

psalm? *"Accedite ad eum et illuminamini"* ("Approach to God and be enlightened"). Approach to Him by meditation on His divine perfections, on the effects of His will, by the contemplation of His great works, and you shall be wonderfully enlightened in His ways. And again: *"In meditatione mea exardescit ignis"* ("in meditation my heart shall be enkindled"). The fire of divine love shall break forth within me. My will shall be melted and become pliant to the movements of grace, even as wax is made soft and pliant before the fire.

II

1. And now as to the method of making mental prayer or meditation as it is familiarly called and which is the first process in its exercise. You have been instructed in it often, and it is made known to you in the works of spiritual writers. But it is not enough to have learned the method; we must put that method into practice daily, and it is good for us at times to take a survey of things that we learned long ago.

There is, first of all, the threefold preparation: the remote, the less remote, and the immediate. The remote preparation for medita-

tion consists in the general regularity and sobriety of our lives. They must not be dissipated or taken up overmuch with worldly concerns; but they must be ordered by recollection and an upright intention to the doing of God's will. Habitual recollection of soul, the practice of the presence of God, the having our spiritual faculties well under control, the having a right intention in all our works,—these constitute the remote preparation for mental prayer; and if these dispositions are wanting, then, like damp fire-wood which ignites with difficulty and gives off a disagreeable smoke in the burning, the meditation is gone through with difficulty and in the midst of continual distractions.

The less remote preparation for meditation consists in the reading over the points to be considered, over-night, or, at least, some time before the actual meditation is to take place. We are so constituted that when we read over a subject we take a deep interest in, there goes on within us a subconscious and intermittent reversion to the different points of the matter which ripens our thoughts on it, links together its disconnected parts, and prepares us for a more fruitful discussion of it afterwards. It is,

if I may say so, the charring of the wood for the burning.

Lastly, there is the immediate preparation for meditation, and this consists in placing ourselves unreservedly in the presence of God, to the exclusion of all thoughts foreign to the subject on hand, and in imploring the assistance of the Holy Ghost, according to the words of Ecclesiasticus (xviii, 23): "Before prayer prepare your soul, and be not as a man who tempteth God."

4. Then there is the meditation itself. This, according to St. Thomas, is divided into three parts—the establishment of the principles, the discussion of the principles, and the conclusion. The establishment of the principles consists in reading over carefully and taking in the points of the meditation. In fact it contains in itself the entire preparation. The discussion of the principles is the meditation proper. This consists in the discussion by the intellect of the subject itself in all its bearings, and the examination of its effects and properties. And, lastly, there is the conclusion. This consists in the simple gaze on, or contemplation of, the truth, the true repose of the mind; for it is by repose that all the motions which are not per-

petual are ended. This repose of the mind, which contemplates sweetly and at leisure its entire object, after having sufficiently meditated on it, is accompanied by admiration, adoration, praise, thanksgiving; and especially and above all, by love, to which the whole exercise should tend and in which it should terminate. When love is finally kindled, we should abandon ourselves to it. It is very ingenious, enlightened, and eloquent. Its ardor will do the rest, will transport it, and cause it to excite all the other affections. Love will also take all the necessary resolutions; for it is never idle, and it works always conformably to the ardor with which it is animated. It knows besides all the means of which it has need for its preservation.

SECOND CONFERENCE

Difficulties in the Practice of Mental Prayer

I

Before passing from the subject of Mental Prayer, I wish to comment briefly on some of the difficulties which souls find in its practice.

The first difficulty souls ordinarily meet with in mental prayer,—one that discourages and disheartens many,—is the apparent impossibility of keeping the mind recollected while engaged in meditation. They take up the duty of mental prayer with a good heart. They read over carefully the subject of their morning's meditation, as prescribed by their spiritual guides, reflect upon it frequently in the interval, pray for the light of the Holy Ghost to enlighten them, and enter on its practice with earnestness and fervor.

But with all this, scarcely have they entered on their half hour's meditation but they find their minds a blank or beset with distractions of every kind. They are sleepy and dull and

can scarcely call forth a thought of piety or prayer during the whole time of the exercise. Now the fact of our suffering involuntary distractions should not disturb us so much if we had brought to prayer the preparation of heart I have above described. Indeed those distractions may otherwise offer us an occasion of gaining much merit from the efforts we put forth to rid ourselves of them; nor do they derogate at all from the efficacy of our prayer, for we are to distinguish three fruits of prayer —nourishment of the soul, impetration, and merit. 'Tis true, we suffer loss of nourishment of soul from prayer made with involuntary distractions. We are not put in the possession of that sweet peace that usually accompanies and follows a prayer made with the full emotions of the heart. But as to the fruits of impetration and merit, there is no depreciation whatever from our prayer's being made in such conditions.

Let us not lose our peace of mind, therefore, nor give up the exercise we are engaged in from the fact of our prayer's being disturbed by involuntary distractions; but let us in these contingencies humble ourselves before God, and He will make good our losses.

2. Nor should we feel disheartened at the fact of our finding difficulty in meditating on certain subjects read for us. These experiences all have. In such cases we may choose another subject, or we may recite fervently the Rosary, meditating the while on the mysteries, and these we shall always find it easy to reflect on. And besides, the repetition of the vocal prayers acts as a stimulant to the jaded mind. For we are to remember that elaborate forms of meditation such as we are accustomed to, with preludes, and composition of place, and conscious preparation of points, and so forth, are in good part a modern introduction into the spiritual life, and were unknown till St. Ignatius and the other great saints of the sixteenth century drew up precise rules for their practice. None of the great saints who lived before the sixteenth century were accustomed to meditate in this formal manner, yet they were sanctified by communing with God in the depths of their hearts, or by joining mental to vocal prayer, as in the Rosary, or from meditating on the spiritual sense of the great prayers of the Church, as the Divine Office and the Psalter of David.

In those old Orders which observe the

method of prayer given them by their founders from the beginning, formal meditation such as is practised in modern times, is unknown. When Cardinal Mercier was being taken by the prior through the monastery of the Grande Chartreuse, he hazarded, as he tells us, the question as to how many hours in the day the monks passed in mental prayer. "Oh," replied his guide, "we are supposed to be always occupied in mental prayer when we are not otherwise mentally engaged." And this was the practice transmitted by the saints of old to their spiritual children.

In this matter we should in good part leave ourselves to the attractions of grace and make mental prayer in the most efficient manner we can for the time being; for this comes from the working of the Holy Ghost in our souls. And even though we spend the half hour or longer with one thought, or in the repetition of the same prayer, our time is fruitfully employed. Witness a St. Francis of Assisi occupied for hours together, repeating with ecstatic fervor the exclamation: "My God!" or the living creatures in the Apocalypse (Ap. iv, 8) crying out continually before the throne of God: "Holy, holy, holy! Lord God Almighty."

3. Another thought,—and it is one that many sorely tried souls should pay particular attention to. It is the teaching of St. Teresa and of St. John of the Cross that the aridity of soul which many are afflicted with in time of meditation, and their inability to enter on the discussion of the matter proposed, comes from this that God calls them to the higher prayer of contemplation. In this He treats them as mothers are wont to treat their infants when they put bitter essences on their nipples in order to wean them and make them crave for a food better adapted to their age and physical development. Nor should such souls shirk through pusillanimity the call to a more sublime form of prayer. Contemplation is the way of progress to which God calls all interior souls, and the practice of meditation belongs only to beginners in the spiritual life.

II

For the consolation of those who are afflicted because of their suffering involuntary distractions, or who feel themselves unable to use discursive acts in time of meditation, let me here quote a few passages from one of the greatest

of mystics, St. Teresa of Jesus: "I could not use my understanding by discursive acts." (Life, Ch. x.) "Let the soul not trouble herself with the understanding which is only a noise-maker." (Life, Ch. v.) "I have spent more than fourteen years without being able even to meditate, if not in reading." (Way of Perfection, Ch. viii.) "If their understanding ceases to act (*i. e.,* meditants, of whom she was speaking), they imagine that they do nothing; they become troubled and cannot bear it, and it is then perhaps that the will, without knowing it, is being nourished with substantial food and acquires new vigor." *"We ought to be well persuaded that many things that are faults in our eyes are not such in the eyes of God."* (Life, Ch. xi.) "The understanding is like a drone bee which buzzes about the hive, and makes itself very important from its size, but produces no honey." "Science will be of great service to learned men both before and after prayer, but during prayer it is in my opinion little necessary for them and serves only to cool the will." "Even at the moment when God holds all the powers of the soul so united to Him that it seems they are detached from the body, nothing less than His sovereign

power can fix the imagination." (Interior Castle, 4th Mans.)

This is what I have to say to you to-day on the subject of meditation, that form of mental prayer which makes so large a part of the exercises of an interior and spiritual life. Cultivate it assiduously and be not disheartened at its difficulties. Habit and God's grace will in time make it easy and enable you to rise without difficulty above commonplace things and everyday life. You will thus begin here on earth to practise the life of Heaven, that life divine in which the beatified are lost in the contemplation of God's excellence.

THIRD CONFERENCE

Informal Meditation

I

1. In our last conference we reflected on the necessity of mental prayer for all, especially for religious and clerics, and for those who are called to a life of perfection. In response to that necessity we see that meditation, the common form of mental prayer, holds an honored place in all clerical and religious houses, and is insisted on with an urgency next only to the urgency demanded for the assistance at holy Mass and the recitation of the Office.

But now, though meditation is, or ought to be, one of the most delightful of all religious exercises, as it is an interchange of thought and affection with God, yet there is no religious exercise more burdensome to many devout souls, or one that calls forth more labor or anxiety. Hence the very general complaint among religious of distractions suffered dur-

ing meditation, and the drowsiness felt, and inability oftentimes of entering into the truths proposed by the devout author whose reflections are read for the community, and discouragement to many souls. For the consolation of those well-disposed but disconsolate souls I want to point out an easy and efficacious method of mental prayer. It is a method very much recommended by the masters of the spiritual life, and one that is within the capacity of the simplest souls. This is the method of informal and unconventional meditation.

2. Let me speak to you on this important subject to-day. And first, let me tell you that there are two kinds of meditation. There is the formal, elaborate, methodical meditation, such as we see practised in all religious communities by the command and direction of the Church. This kind of meditation has been practised by devout souls for many centuries past with great fruit of sanctity, and to its exercise all those who feel themselves competent are urged. But many souls, and they are to be met with in every religious community, find themselves, whether through inaptitude of disposition, or because God wishes to lead them by another way to sanctity, wholly incapable of

exercising this kind of mental prayer; and even with those who ordinarily exercise it, and derive great fruit of sanctity therefrom, there are circumstances and times where its exercise is difficult, if not impossible.

Shall we oblige such souls to hobble all through life, and in despair, along a road that is beyond their power to travel, with the prospect of arriving late, or not at all, at the term of perfect prayer? God does not command impossibilities. His ordinary way is to draw souls to Him according to their dispositions and the capacity of their nature. Nor are we to pay attention to those, whether they be spiritual writers or directors of souls, who urge the necessity of, and prescribe the one method, that of methodical meditation, for all, in order to attain the object of the religious life. For we are to remember that God, who wishes all to be perfect, calls souls to perfection by many different routes, and that the New Jerusalem is entered through many different gates, that in God's house there are many mansions, and that the soil of our souls produces different fruits of holiness and merit, and that the magnificence of God's works is shown to us by their variety.

For such souls, therefore, who find the way of formal and methodical meditation barred against them, it is consoling and beyond all computation delightful to know that there is another and an easier way of communing continually with God by mental prayer,—a way that is open to the most simple and unlettered soul, and reaches to the highest and most consummate prayer of contemplation and union with God. This is the prayer of simple and spontaneous meditation. It comprises all stages of mental prayer, from the simple efforts put forth by the little child repeating his "Our Fathers," to the prayer of consummate union effected by the saint with his God. This is taught by all the masters of the spiritual life —by St. Teresa, by St. John of the Cross, by the great Dominican school reaching back to the Middle Ages, and beyond them to the great mystics and Fathers of the early ages of the Church.

To this form of mental prayer chiefly were given the warm commendations pronounced by the Doctors and Fathers of the Church.

For formal and methodical meditation, with remote and immediate preparation, with preludes, and composition of place, and division

into points, and discussion of the reasoning powers, and conclusions, and spiritual nosegays, is the elaborate product of modern times. The great saints and mystics of former centuries never knew or practised it, though raised by God to consummate sanctity.

II

1. And now since such great advantages are to be derived from this unconventional method of mental prayer, and since its practice is within the capacity of all, it is good that I should point out to you an easy and efficacious way to help us in its use. This is by the cultivation of the sense of God's presence, or of His nearness to us, wherever we may be. It is this sense of His presence that God asked of Abraham, and in return for which He assured him that he would attain perfection. "Walk before me," He says, "and be perfect," that is, "thou shalt be perfect."

2. That God is present to us at all times and everywhere is a truth of faith, and to deny it would be an act of impiety and folly, and an abuse of the light of reason. He is present to us in three ways, as the attribute of His immensity demands: by His essence; that is to say,

His Supreme Being contains all things. He is present by His power. He made all things, He preserves all things, and were He to withdraw Himself from them for an instant, they would return to their original nothingness. It is in this sense St. Paul says that God "is not far from each one of us," since it is from Him we receive life, and being, and all things. He is in us by His presence, that is to say, He is intimately united with each one of us. He hears all that we say. He sees all that we do. He knows all that passes within us, from the complete and deliberate act of the will, down to the slightest motion of desire or other movement of the heart. Of this presence of God everywhere, and of His knowledge of our works, the Psalmist was profoundly conscious, and it was this consciousness that kept him in the practice of perfection, as he intimates to us when he says: "Lord, thou hast proved me and known me. Thou hast known my sitting down and my rising up. Thou hast understood my thoughts afar off; my path and my line thou hast searched out. Thou hast foreseen all my ways. Behold, O Lord, thou hast known all things, the last, and those of old. Thy knowledge is become wonderful to me, and I cannot

reach it. Whither shall I go from thy spirit, and whither shall I flee from thy face? If I ascend into heaven: thou art there. If I descend into hell: thou art present. If I take my wings in the morning and dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea, even there also shall thy hand lead me, and thy right hand shall hold me. And I said: perhaps darkness shall cover me, and night shall be light in my pleasures. But darkness shall not be darkness to thee, and night shall be light as the day. The darkness and the light thereof are alike to thee."

The realization of this nearness of God to us, and of the worship that is due to Him, draws forth from our hearts spontaneous acts of adoration, love, desire, praise, thanksgiving, and petition; and in these acts consists the highest exercise of mental prayer.

3. This sense of God's presence is realized in a higher and more intimate manner by the reflection of His indwelling in the souls of all those who are in the state of grace. Of this supernatural presence of God within the souls of the just we have the assurance of our Divine Lord Himself, as it is expressed in the Gospel of St. John: "If anyone love me, he will keep my word; and my Father will love him, and

we," that is, the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Ghost, "will come to him, and make our abode with him."

The manner of this divine life which animates all those who are in the state of grace, our Lord Himself makes known to us more clearly when treating of the mystery of the Holy Eucharist; for, He says, "as the living Father hath sent me, and I live by the Father; so he that eateth me, the same also, shall live by me." He shall live My divine life.

God then dwells within us. We are made "partakers of the divine nature." He is the vine; we are the branches. We draw the supernatural life of our souls from Jesus Christ. The grace that sanctifies Him also sanctifies us. The beauty of the soul in grace is the reflected beauty of the divine essence. As the heated iron shares in the qualities and puts on the dignity of the fiery element that affects it; so we, while retaining always our human nature, share in the dignity of the Eternal. "We are gods, and children of the Most High." How the conception of these prerogatives of the soul in grace helps in the practice of mental prayer! And it was this conception that was chiefly instrumental in enabling

devout souls to persevere uninterruptedly in prayer and union with God.

For this reason St. Teresa would have her sisters represent their interior as a palace of indescribable magnificence, built entirely of gold and precious stones, and in this palace she would have lodged the Great King, who had been pleased to become their guest; or she would have them consider their soul as a delicious garden in which the Lord took delight to walk. And she would have them beg Him to deign to increase the perfume of the little flowers of virtue that were beginning to show signs of budding forth therein, and that He would preserve them for His own glory; or as a magnificent temple, spacious, rich, and well adorned, and resounding continually with prayers, and thanksgivings, and praises of God. Above all, she would have them on the altar of their heart, ever aflame with the fire of holy love, continually offer up to God the acceptable sacrifice of their affections, immolating to Him their every desire, in order that it might be brought into perfect conformity with His divine will.

4. And does not Holy Scripture give sanction for those figures and representations?

Thus, the Canticle represents God as standing at the door of this palace and knocking, that we may open to Him: "I sleep, and my heart watcheth the voice of my beloved knocking: 'open to me, my sister, my love, my undefiled.' " And the soul, having heard the knocking of His divine hand, and the loving invitation of His voice, says: "I arose up to open to my beloved." And again in the Apocalypse: "Behold, I stand at the gate and knock. If any man shall hear my voice, and open to me the door, I will come to him, and sup with him, and he with me."

And as to the figure representing the soul as the garden of the Lord, this also is taken from the Sacred Pages; as, for instance, in the Canticle it is said: "My sister, my spouse, is a garden enclosed." We can contemplate the Beloved coming down into this garden of our soul to refresh Himself with the fragrance of its flowers, to taste its fruits, and to pluck its lilies. Happy the soul that can repeat with truth the words of the Spouse: "I to my Beloved, and my Beloved to me, who feedeth among the lilies." "In our gates are all the fruits: the new and the old, my beloved, I have kept for thee."

St. Albert's College Library

And so of others, as when we liken the soul to the throne of wisdom on which the Lord of Glory sits; or, to the heavens which announce the glory of God; or, to a temple, as St. Paul styles the soul of the just. All those representations and reflections which fix the soul in the contemplation of God dwelling within us help most powerfully in the practice of mental prayer.

5. Exercise yourselves daily, then, in the realization of God's presence within you. Thus you will grow in reverence and holy fear. Your heart will become inflamed with His holy love. It will cement more and more the union of your soul with the Beloved, and will enable you to arrive speedily at the perfection of holy prayer.

FOURTH CONFERENCE

Affective Prayer (I)

I

"My child; give me thy heart." (Prov. xxiii, 26.)

1. It is the call of the Spouse to the faithful soul. He is content with nothing less than our entire love, and this love embraces all the affections of the heart.

To-day we shall take up the subject of affective prayer. The first question that will be asked, naturally is: What is affective prayer?

Affective prayer may be described as an elevation of the soul to God by different acts of the will. Considerations are not completely excluded from this prayer, principally under the form of preparation; but they are given only little development. It is the will above all that acts.

Affective prayer, such as we understand it here, holds the middle between simple medita-

tion and ordinary contemplation, properly so called, which is manifested fully in the prayer of *active recollection.* Nevertheless, the simple and loving gaze of contemplation is sometimes, nay, even pretty often, found in it in a very consoling manner,—a thing which explains the language of certain ancient authors, where affective prayer seems to be confounded with contemplation. It is in fact difficult for a soul to enter into affective prayer without enjoying moments of contemplation.

Some authors call affective prayer, "prayer of abandonment to the good pleasure of God": others, "the prayer of the heart," etc. "Call it what you may," says Father Piny, a learned Dominican of the seventeenth century, "it is no other thing than a loving union of our will with God and with His divine will: in such sort that one makes perfectly this prayer of the heart as long as the will remains lovingly united to God and His holy will. This takes place during all the time that the soul is in the *actual state* of willing to be there to love, adore, and supplicate God, and to remain abandoned to His divine will in all that it will please Him to do with her, and in every position where it will please Him to place her. It is in this that

the affective and loving union of the soul with God consists, and through this union the prayer of the heart."

When authors call affective prayer, "the prayer of abandonment to the good pleasure of God," they do not intend to exclude other acts of the will, such as desire, hope, compassion, etc. It is solely to indicate the principal act around which all the other affective acts of this prayer group and unite themselves. For this prayer, in exciting the affections of the will, excites love, which produces all the other emotions of the soul, and in particular a perfect conformity to the divine will.

2. It may be asked, does this prayer rest on a solid foundation? I answer yes. All souls have not want of an equal preparation for prayer. There are those who, by continued interior recollection, preserve the sacred fire in their hearts and have it quickly rekindled. It is on this principle that is founded this second manner of mental prayer, made by the affections. It is very useful, and there is no danger in using it. Moreover, the end of prayer, as well as of the whole Christian life, is the union of the soul with God. This union, while we live on earth, is effected better by love than by

knowledge. The understanding has great advantages over, and is absolutely more perfect than, the will. Furthermore, in Heaven knowledge is more perfect than love, of which it is the rule and the measure; in such sort that it can never be greater than knowledge.

Nevertheless, if we consider these two powers in the moral order and with regard to the last end, which is the Sovereign Good, the will holds the first rank. It is it that carries itself to the Sovereign Good as to its proper object, and that gives motion to all the other powers to merit His possession. Union with God, which is the end of prayer and of the whole Christian life, is affected better by love than by knowledge. This is why, when a soul enters on prayer sufficiently recollected, and when the simple view of the object makes an impression sufficiently strong upon the will, without its being necessary to use a greater application, she can without difficulty lay aside reasoning and considerations. For if a look alone suffices, she can omit the rest without fear and occupy herself in producing acts of admiration, adoration and love.

3. "It is advantageous, even necessary, during affective prayer to seek to unite in a cer-

tain measure the acts of the understanding to those of the will. But when, as a consequence of obscurities in which one finds himself, as often happens, it is not possible to occupy one's mind with reflections on some salutary truth, some mystery or perfection of God, one must not on that account think oneself dispensed from continuing the prayer of the heart; since one makes it perfectly when one truly wishes to make it. The soul is united lovingly to her God and to His divine will by this union of the prayer of the heart, as long as she is in this will, to be there for the purpose of loving, adoring, and remaining abandoned to the divine will—a thing one can have, and in fact has, when one wishes, since these are interior acts of the will, and one can will it, although the mind finds itself involuntarily occupied at the time with some other thing." And here is a remark that I want to make. Those who find themselves more disposed to produce affections than to make great reasonings, ought not to be troubled. They ought, on the contrary, to be assured that there is no danger even if they occupy all the time of prayer in the actual exercise of a single virtue, either of faith, or of love, or of humility, or of a respectful fear of God's

sovereignty. They must, however, commence with ordinary preparation and always do on their part whatever they reasonably can, diffidence in oneself being one of the best dispositions to obtain the true spirit of prayer. Christian humility requires that they hold themselves always in the ranks of the most imperfect and follow common rules. But if, in presenting themselves before God, they find themselves already recollected and are penetrated with the mystery they wish to meditate on, they can follow this motive without constraining their mind to the consideration of a particular subject. This violence would take away from their devotion and would cause them to lose the spirit of their prayer.

4. Let me here insist that disengagement of the heart is particularly necessary to make affective prayer well. As it is principally the heart that acts in this prayer, it is the heart that we ought chiefly to prepare, so that our union with God may become more loving, strong, and intimate.

Now, we cannot better prepare our heart than by disengaging it from all its imperfections, in such a way that if we feel an inclina-

tion to evil, a repugnance to goodness, and a thousand other imperfections, this would not be an act of the heart or of the will, but a consequence of our evil state of original corruption.

If the heart is disengaged, if the will is detached from all that is imperfect in us, if the defects with which our fallen nature is filled are to our heart and will as so many subjects of pain and groaning, we can then aspire to this loving union of the soul with God which constitutes the prayer of the heart. This is without doubt what the Holy Ghost wished to teach us by demanding from us only the heart and the will: "My child, give me thy heart"; as if He wished to say that He demands of us not that we present ourselves before Him in the prayer of the heart with a nature exempt from imperfection, from the inclination to evil and repugnance to good, but with a heart disengaged from all those imperfections, a heart pure and holy as far as it is necessary to belong entirely to God.

O souls, who groan under the weight of your imperfections, your lot is much happier than you thought, since God expects from you not a perfect nature, but only a heart truly dis-

engaged from the imperfections of nature. You can hope for all from His infinite bounty if you have put away all the obstacles that prevent Him from uniting Himself with you.

FIFTH CONFERENCE

Affective Prayer (II)

I

1. We have studied various methods of prayer—vocal prayer, meditation, affective prayer. As a result we have learned that the prayer which is made by the affections has its advantages as well as that made by reason. In this matter, therefore, we have freedom of choice. Each one ought to consult his own soul as to the method of prayer he should select, and not be led blindly by the method employed by others; or, rather, he ought to study in what way God wishes to draw him to Himself. All depends on Him, and our concern ought to be to tend to follow Him and to keep ourselves in the way that He has traced out for us.

This prayer of the heart has three great advantages,—facility, necessity, and merit.

(a) It is easy; for while all are not equally capable of great reasonings, almost all can easily produce affections.

(b) It is necessary, because the necessity of practising virtue comes not on the side of the understanding, but on the side of the will and of the inferior appetite, of which we must reanimate the languor and reawaken the activity.

(c) It is of the greatest merit; for the will alone is its principle, and in exciting the affections, we excite love, the first motion of the heart, which rules all the other motions and is the most perfect of all.

2. It is easy, I say. The most simple souls, who know only the first principles of religion, are quite capable of making it. In fact, inflamed with a pure love, they can pass entire hours with God in expressing to Him their ardor by colloquies in a thousand different ways. Knowledge and all the qualities of the mind are for man an occasion of self-esteem, a thing which prevents him from abandoning himself entirely into the hands of God, and through which he loses devotion; whilst simple souls sometimes have more devotion because they have more humility. However, knowledge and

natural perfections, if we submit them to God, can serve to increase our devotion. For our defects come not from the gifts of nature, but from the bad use we make of them. Simplicity of faith with much ardor suffices for this prayer, even though one may not have many lights.

We need only to know how to love the infinite good of our Creator, our Redeemer, and our Sanctifier, or groan before God with a sorrow accompanied with confidence at considering our own misery and continual frailties; for all the subjects that one can take to meditate on, can be reduced to those two heads—the goodness of God, and our own misery; the benefits that we have received from Him and that we hope to receive from Him, and our continual defects, for which we ask a remedy.

What need, then, of so much discussion, so many reasonings, and so many lights, to excite us to love a God who is so amiable? Who can be ignorant of his own frailty, his falls, and his tepidity? It is not knowledge that teaches us these things, but experience. This is why we can continue longer in affective prayer than in the prayer of discussion. The will is not exhausted so easily as the mind.

The best means to keep attentive is not to assemble a multitude of thoughts, but to excite the affections of the will; for we are more strongly moved by those pious affections than by the operations of the understanding. This is why the most assured means of having and preserving attention in prayer is to put in action the will and to excite frequent affections. The will, inflamed, arrests the mind, and obliges it to hold present to it the object towards which it carries itself,—a thing that is the stay and the fruit of prayer.

3. The second reason which sets off affective prayer is its necessity. We have greater need of gaining the will than of persuading the understanding. The difficulty of practising virtue comes not from the want of knowledge, but from the lack of love. The corruption of our nature is more widespread over our will than over our understanding.

All lights, all considerations, all reasonings, are remedies. They cure ignorance, which is the first defect of nature. But it helps nothing to have the mind clear if the will is languishing. Should I not impute my ruin to myself if seeing the precipice, I deprive myself of the power which would prevent me from falling into it?

And am I not the more guilty if I throw myself into dangers which I see before my eyes, and to which I willfully expose myself? Frailty causes my ruin. Knowledge renders it inexcusable. I can convince myself of my obligations by dint of meditation. I can even by reason arrest or soften the impetuosity of my passions; but who will cure me of the languor that I feel when I must fulfill the law? Who will make me overcome my sloth? Who will remove from me the disgust for the things of God? All the succor that comes to me from the understanding is only an imperfect and useless remedy that I employ. But love, ardor, pleasure, all that comes from the will if I excite and inflame it,—behold the true remedy which cures! Love makes languor disappear. Love chases away sloth. Pleasure dissipates disgust; and all this brings to the soul an invincible power. It has never been told, and it will never be told, that all the extraordinary graces which God has bestowed on souls have been imparted in a prayer which was all passed in reasoning.

Love alone brings about union of hearts and merits those divine communications. But leaving aside the extraordinary operations of God,

we ought to be persuaded that a soul has never felt, and never will feel, any consolation, any devotion or pleasure in her prayer, if these communications descend not from the mind into the heart and will; because all these sentiments of tenderness and devotion are solely the fruits of love, and not of knowledge and reason.

4. This affective prayer is, finally, meritorious, because, in exciting the affections of the will, it excites love, which produces all the other movements. Love is the principle of all merits which we can acquire with the help of grace.

If we consider the nature of man, we shall see that love and knowledge are inseparable. The will can never love an object which is not shown to it; and an excellent and very amiable object cannot be known without being loved. By consideration or meditation we strike our heart, sometimes as hard as a rock. But when the fire is kindled and the will is well excited, we must stay the understanding to allow the will to act, till we feel that it commences to slacken. We must then return to meditation and strike the will a second time, to make new sparks come from it. Thus we alternate con-

sideration and love. Nevertheless, love which is the end of knowledge, must have the better part in prayer. For knowledge, however sublime it may be, can never obtain for us a single degree of merit, nor make us advance one step in virtue. This is the sole privilege of love.

II

1. And now let us consider what we are to do in order to make affective prayer well.

We can prescribe no rules to lead the affections in so great a variety of states and dispositions. Here are, however, some examples. It sometimes happens that a soul comes to prayer all recollected; she represents to herself Jesus Christ on the cross, and feeling herself penetrated with this sole view, there arise in her heart a crowd of emotions which tend to present themselves all at once in order to testify to God her love, her confidence, her gratitude, her grief, etc. She desires then to be crucified with Him, to destroy herself in order to vindicate Him. She approaches in spirit to receive the Precious Blood that flows from His wounds. She embraces the cross and bathes it with her tears. She complains to the eternal Father for having exercised so great a rigor

on His innocent Son. She would wish to have the love, not of a seraph, but of all the Seraphim together in order to love Him more ardently.

In a word, in this state the soul is in transports which she is unable to moderate. She speaks interiorly without order and measure. She does not know what she says or what she ought to say. Her love surpasses her power of expression.

St. Bernard and St. Thomas call this state a spiritual drunkenness, which causes the soul to go out of herself. It is true that those emotions are more violent in an infused prayer, where God operates directly. Nevertheless, as all virtues are the same in the imperfect and the perfect, this disposition can be found sometimes in a common prayer and in persons who possess only ordinary virtue.

It is certain that in this manner of praying there is no danger of error, although there is only a simple knowledge; and if there is a certain repose, it is only on the side of the understanding. The will operates ardently and frequently.

2. The ardor of the soul is not always so violent. Holding herself with respect in the pres-

ence of God, she from time to time forms some act of faith, of hope, of love, or of some other virtue. She regards God as a sun. Putting aside sweetly and tranquilly the thoughts and ideas of earthly things, which might prevent her from seeing Him clearly, and from receiving the heat which He ordinarily imparts; she esteems herself happy to be in His presence, doubting not that God regards her as she regards Him,—that is to say, with love. In this continual view she feels herself inflamed; for it is impossible to be before the sun, or before a great fire, without feeling its heat. The soul then produces different acts; sometimes she feels herself languishing because she does not love God as she ought to, and as she would wish. At other times she abandons herself to the will of God, wishing to be in time and eternity only what will please Him, convinced by the knowledge of her nothingness that she deserves nothing, that she can merit nothing of herself, and that the divine will must be the rule of her happiness.

Sometimes she enters into a greater confidence and beseeches God to fill the void of her heart. She dares to say to Him that in order to fill it He must give her a great love, because

she feels that her desire has no bounds and the more she will love this infinite Goodness, the more she will desire to love Him.

At other times she hearkens with a marvellous fidelity to the inspirations of Heaven, and it seems to her that God speaks conformably to her dispositions and her wants, that He chides her for her infidelities, that He urges her to make the greatest efforts to love Him, that He makes her clearly comprehend the necessity of mortifying herself unceasingly.

Finally, the soul that is not carried to reasoning and a multitude of thoughts, ceases not to produce acts according to her state and dispositions, without losing God from view, without becoming dissipated, and without remaining in a slothful laxity.

SIXTH CONFERENCE

The Prayer of Recollection

I

1. To-day we take up a third form of mental prayer, the prayer of recollection.

The first thing to be asked concerning it is: what is the prayer of recollection?

The prayer of recollection is a superior form of affective prayer, much more perfect than the former. The soul puts herself in the presence of God and fixes herself on the subject of prayer. After a summary and rapid process of reasoning, which gives her so to speak an intuition of the truth that she considers, the soul feels a very sweet sentiment, although as yet feeble and transient, of the presence and the possession of God.

The attention, accompanied and sustained by tender sentiments, is directed to His Majesty, whilst the will in peace and repose pours itself out in brief and measured aspirations of love.

This sense of the divine presence is not the fruit of the imagination or of the reasoning power. It is a reward that the Lord freely grants to the soul who excites herself to love Him in the fervor of her prayers and recollection of spirit. Therefore, it does not depend *exclusively* on her to enjoy this tender attention. She cannot interrupt her prayer at will. True, none of her faculties is bound; she is not absorbed in God; but her attention is sufficiently fixed, so that she dreams not of ceasing to pray. She can, nevertheless, cease as soon as a distraction presents itself, a thing that happens easily and frequently.

2. We must distinguish two periods in the prayer of recollection. There is first a period of *activity,* which tends towards a second period, in the course of which the soul becomes more and more *passive.*

In the former period the soul is often favored in a feeble and transient manner with certain graces proper to *infused* contemplation, of which the *passive* period of the prayer of recollection is in some sort the threshold, giving access to the full mystic life.

We are not, however, to establish a strict separation between these two periods, though

we can consider them as two different species of prayer; for the latter is the easy and normal evolution of the former. The *contemplative* period may not even take place; it is not the necessary consequence of the *active* period. It is due altogether to the generosity of God, who holds count of the pious desires of the soul, of her constant fidelity to prayer and meditation.

This double aspect of the prayer of recollection makes it a prayer intermediate between the lower and the higher degrees of prayer. It indicates a state of transition in which the soul passes from the ascetic to the mystic life and arrives at the threshold of *infused* contemplation.

According to certain authors this prayer by reason of its second period is so to speak a first degree of supernatural contemplation, work of the gift of wisdom; it pertains nevertheless to meditation. It is then partly acquired and partly infused; it forms a term of transition, Again, we can consider it as an inferior contemplation by which God crowns the efforts of meditation and the familiar entertainments of the soul with Him.

The prayer of recollection is particularly im-

portant, not because it is *ordinary contemplation,* which the pious soul ought to propose to herself as the term of her spiritual ambition, since it is only the prelude of infused contemplation; but because it is the sign of the individual call of God inviting the soul to ascend higher (*"ascende superius"*). Now it is sovereignly important in order to her supernatural progress, that the soul respond faithfully to those divine solicitations.

This prayer is given different names according as it is considered under different aspects. Thus it is called the prayer of ordinary, active, or acquired contemplation, of pure faith, of simple regard, of recollection, etc. We choose the last designation, as it appears the most precise. In its fullness it includes the two periods spoken of, leaving liberty to specify the beginnings of it, or its ordinary and ultimate development, or whether it pertains to the active or to the passive state. What is important is to recognize those two states which constitute two different species of prayer, and which are indicated by St. Teresa as the source of two high supernatural gifts—the *contentments* coming in good part from nature, but tending to terminate in God, and the *tastes* coming di-

rectly from God as the gift of His generosity and love.

It is evident that in this prayer there are not a great number of acts, particularly when one has often meditated on the same subjects before. For then all the ideas gathered beforehand present themselves at once to the mind in a very simple manner. It is certain also that on the side of the will there are very few acts, because a single act of fear or love fills all its capacity and prevents it from producing many such acts.

We see the same thing happen in a violent passion. Small griefs permit us to complain; but great griefs strike us dumb, nay, sometimes even take away the use of the faculties. The same thing happens in an unhoped-for joy, and in an extraordinary happiness, or when one is seized with awe in the presence of a great personage. Now grace does not destroy nature; it perfects it. Reason comes to the aid of faith, and in our need of loving, God employs nature; but He increases the force of it, it may be in joys, it may be in sorrows, and the predestination of the elect is a part of His common providence. Thus when we repose in prayer, the supernatural truths

are capable of making the same impressions on us as extraordinary objects in the natural order. We are equally seized and touched according to circumstances with joy, respect, fear, and then the understanding and the will have only simple, but very perfect operations, which fill the powers and consequently prevent them from producing a great number of acts.

We cannot state that there is here a repose which degenerates into idleness. We must not always judge of the perfection of a prayer and of its ardor by the multitude of its acts. For it is the effect of ardor, when it is very great, to preserve the soul in repose, and to absorb it so that it produces but very few acts. *Pious persons ought to apply themselves oftener than they do to this prayer,* which is simple, ardent, and tranquil. They fatigue themselves in prayer by over much reasoning. They seek numerous thoughts. They are restless to seek and to find God and to unite themselves to Him,—which ought to be the end of all prayer, —and meanwhile they can find Him *within themselves* and enjoy His presence. Often when they seek Him abroad, they lose Him in their search. Are not our souls the temples of

God? Does not the Holy Trinity dwell in our hearts? Does not the Holy Ghost give Himself to us? Jesus in giving Himself, does He not give the whole Godhead in order that we may be able to enjoy it? We must, then, enter into ourselves. We must enjoy this divine presence in silence and repose.

II

1. Besides St. Teresa, St. Francis de Sales, and others whose teachings we have given, we can say that all mystic authors celebrate the security, utility, and soundness of this prayer. We shall content ourselves with citing one or two. Bossuet composed a résumé of prayer in fifteen articles for the religious of the Visitation of Meaux. We will cite the first three:

a) "We must accustom ourselves," he says, "to nourish our mind with a simple and loving gaze on God and our Lord Jesus Christ; and to this end we must withdraw it softly from reasoning, discussion, and a *multitude of affections,* in order to hold it in simplicity, respect and attention, and thus approach more and more closely to God, its sole and Sovereign Good, its first beginning, and last end."

b) "The perfection of this life consists in

union with our Sovereign Good, and the greater the simplicity of the act, the more perfect is the union. This is why grace solicits those who wish to be perfect to become simple, so as to be at last rendered capable of the enjoyment of the one thing necessary; that is to say, of eternal unity."

c) "Meditation is very good in its time and very useful at the commencement of the spiritual life; but we must not remain in meditation always, since the soul by her fidelity in mortifying herself and by her recollection ordinarily attains to a more pure and intimate prayer, which we may call *the prayer of simplicity.* This consists in a simple gaze on, or loving attention to, some divine object within herself, be it God or one of His perfections; be it Jesus Christ or one of His mysteries, or some other Christian truth. The soul lays aside reasoning, and employs a sweet contemplation, which holds her peaceful, attentive, and susceptible of the divine operations and impressions which the Holy Ghost imparts to her. She does little, and receives much. Her labor is sweet, and yet fruitful; and as she approaches more closely to the source of all light, and grace, and virtue, she expands the more."

2. Father Rigoleuc, a holy and learned Jesuit, treating of the same prayer, says: "The soul, at the sight of God, whom she considers as the sole Being in the world, all the rest being as nothing, forgets all, and despoils herself as far as she can of the remembrance and affection of creatures. She remains before God in silence and suspends the acts, that is, the discursive and explicit acts, of all her powers in regard to every other object. The mind does nothing but look on God with a *clouded faith* and without any discussion of the reason. The will has no other occupation than a simple acquiescence in God. Behold in what consists the exercise of this prayer.

"Those who practise it, being no longer able to meditate, finding no more relish and little profit in meditation, no matter what diligence they employ, feel themselves constrained so to speak to remain in a simple recollection, and following this attraction with the advice of their director, aided by the ordinary help of grace, they suspend the acts of the understanding and the will and hold themselves in a respectful silence before God. Their prayer is natural as to the manner of making it. We can practise it without fear of illusion and

with great profit to our soul, provided that we are courageous in mortifying ourselves and faithfully following the motions of grace."

The best mystic authors then make the prayer of recollection in its ultimate development consist in an act of ordinary contemplation; that is to say, in a simple and loving gaze of the soul reflecting on God within herself, and fixing herself on Him; and to give this ordinary contemplation its proper character, they say that it is a loving attention to God's presence. Many beginners apply themselves to consider God as filling all by His immensity; but after a while, souls called by God to contemplation represent Him as present in themselves.

Whatever is the manner of practising this prayer, the soul can no longer meditate, at least habitually. The ordinary acts of affective prayer no longer suffice for her. She needs, in order to be moved and drawn to God, a simple ray of truth. The intelligence and the will are drawn to Him by a clouded faith and a simple compliance.

SEVENTH CONFERENCE

The Effects of the Prayer of Recollection

I

Having studied the nature of that form of mental prayer known to mystics as the *Prayer of Recollection,* seeing the simplicity of its acts and the many commendations given it by mystic authors, we now go on to study its principal effects on the soul, what those ought to do who begin to practise it, and how they ought to dispose themselves for it. Its chief effects are described by Father Massoulié, a noted Dominican author, who says: "When the soul comes to consider that she has not only the honor of being in the presence of God, but, moreover, the happiness of possessing Him in herself, this thought penetrates her sensibly and makes her enter into a profound recollection. She gazes lovingly on this God of love and majesty, on the whole adorable Trinity who thus deigns to enter into her and who dwells in her as in a temple. She regards Him with an ex-

treme complacency. She rejoices at the pleasure of this possession, and she finds in it an inexpressible repose, seeing all her desires accomplished as far as they can be on earth. For what more grand can the soul desire and hope for than the possession of God? This possession is always accompanied by three Fruits of the Holy Ghost: charity, joy, and peace. In fact, whence can joy come, if not from the possession of the God whom one loves? What pleasure can equal that of a soul who feels, as far as one can feel in this mortal life, that she possesses the God whom she loves, and who in turn takes complacency in her; since it is God Himself who excites her and loves her, and who inflames her with His love? What can trouble a soul who has the happiness of possessing God and esteems all the rest as nothing?" "There is in the soul," says St. Thomas, "a double repose; the repose she has in the desire itself, and the repose that follows motion. The repose of desire is tasted when one finds all his wishes satisfied in the possession of God, when one does all things for Him and desires only Him. It is in this sense that the will of the just man during this mortal life stops and reposes in God. The other repose

which ends all motion is the last term. It is the repose of the blessed in Heaven."

The soul then is wholly occupied with this thought that she has received a great Guest, and although she sometimes enters into the anxieties of Martha, she enters also sometimes into the repose of Mary. She preserves herself in peace and perfect tranquillity, and thinks only of enjoying her Spouse.

At other times the soul, touched at the infinite greatness of God, before whom she sees herself as less than an atom, is filled with astonishment and fear. This respectful fear goes sometimes even to overwhelm her with the weight of God's greatness which she contemplates. All this is known to those who have some experience of this prayer. They have felt more or less the same joys and the same transports according to the light they have received. Let them take care to be faithful: for fidelity is here more necessary than great reasonings.

II

1. And now as to those who begin to practise this method of prayer, let me say that it is the common experience to find a difficulty

in remaining peaceful and tranquil in the midst of the apparent void, and at sight of the simplicity of the action.

In this case one can, if such is the attraction of grace, very quietly make some acts; take up a point of meditation and draw from it affections, listen to our Lord if He deigns to speak, make acts of resignation and filial abandonment to the will of God, enter into oneself with humility, and represent to oneself the Divine Saviour in the mysteries of His life and death, etc. But all this ought to be done without any effort and, as far as possible, without losing sight of God's presence.

2. Father Honorius of St. Mary, a pious disciple of St. Teresa, gives excellent counsels on this subject. "Those," he says, "who begin to enter on contemplation, are often much embarrassed. They know not how to occupy themselves so as not to remain idle, or how to employ their powers; for, in this prayer eager acts are suppressed and their sensible and more coarse operations cease.

"The activity of the powers is arrested with difficulty to give place to the interior recollection that is necessary in order to consider God present with the light of faith. We must not

then employ considerations, reasonings, formal acts, or seek with eagerness of desire devotion and sensible consolations by the way of meditation. The soul ought solely to pay attention to God, and in a loving manner produce no other acts than those that He actually inspires. She ought to regard God with as much love as he who holds his eyes fixed with attention on the one whom he loves tenderly. Her greatest application and all her care, if she is to have any during this time, ought to be to preserve this sweet regard, to persevere in it to the utmost that she can, and to maintain herself in peace, simplicity, and detachment from all things, in purity and repose. Finally, the soul ought to impose a profound silence on her exterior senses, on her interior faculties, on her spiritual powers, and arrest their eager motions and all their operations with the exception of those that concur with the amorous regards and acts of virtue implicit and virtual which accompany it, lest they prevent her from hearing the voice of God, who speaks secretly to her heart in this interior solitude.

"The soul ought to be so attentive to this Divine Word that, whilst this view lasts, she should make no reflection on herself, or on

what she does, or upon anything created, for fear of interrupting its action. She must so comport herself as if she no longer remembered even the loving gaze to which she devotes herself, to be wholly occupied in listening to the voice of God, and in an entire liberty to accommodate herself to what He demands of her. Then, as the air, when pure and without agitation, is easily penetrated by the rays of the sun; so, this soul receives, with sweetness and without pain, the divine lights and ardors with which she feels herself all penetrated whilst the affectionate regard subsists, and is wholly absorbed in God."

3. And now let us consider how, according to St. Teresa, one can dispose himself for this prayer of recollection.

"In this prayer," she says, "the soul recalls all her powers and enters within herself with her God. In this interior retreat" continues the saint, "the soul, *alone with her adorable Saviour,* can think of His Passion, adore Him as present, and offer Him to His Father, without making the least effort of the mind to seek Him on Calvary, or in the Garden, or at the Pillar. Those who can thus shut themselves up in this heaven of their soul, where He dwells

who has created Heaven and earth, who can accustom themselves to regard nothing exterior, and who can pray in a place where nothing distracts their exterior senses, must believe that they walk in an excellent way, and that they cease not to drink at the fountain of life. . . . This is one of the ways to contract the habit of this recollection. Represent to yourself that there is within you a magnificent palace of gold and precious stones, worthy of the great Monarch who dwells therein: and fancy, what is very true, that you concur in part in giving it this magnificence. This palace is your soul. When it is pure, the beauty of the most superb edifice is effaced before yours. The virtues are the jewels that form its attire, and the greater they are, the more those jewels give forth splendor. Finally, imagine that the King of Kings is in this palace, that in His infinite goodness He wishes to be your Father, that He is seated on a throne of great splendor, and that this throne is your heart. . . . Is there anything so worthy of admiration as to see Him who fills with His greatness a thousand worlds, enclose Himself in so small an abode as your soul? In truth, as He is the absolute Master, He carries liberty with Him:

and as He loves us, He deigns to proportion Himself to our littleness. Full of tenderness and condescension for the soul that enters on His holy ways, He does not manifest Himself to her at first, lest she might be troubled at the sight of such greatness which comes to unite itself to our littleness. But by degrees He dilates this soul; He enlarges her and thus renders her capable of containing the gifts and treasures which He pleases to put into her. This power of enlarging at His will the palace of our soul is what makes me say that He brings liberty with Him. The essential point for us is to offer Him this palace with our whole heart and to make of it to Him an absolute and irrevocable gift, and to take from it all that can wound His regards, so that nothing can cramp the action of His grace and love. He gives Himself to us only when we give ourselves entirely to Him."

Such is, according to St. Teresa, one of the ways of disposing ourselves for the prayer of recollection. Our soul is a palace which we must prepare and adorn, or, rather, which we must allow to be prepared and adorned by the divine action: for it is the abode of the King of kings.

EIGHTH CONFERENCE

Other Ways in Which We Can Render God Present to Us

I

In our last conference I gave you an example how, according to St. Teresa, we can render God interiorly present to us so as to dispose ourselves for the prayer of recollection.

Let me to-day show you as further examples how we can, if such is the attraction of grace, render God present to us in other ways.

And, first, we can render God interiorly present to us by a great spirit of charity, which makes us love and adore God for ourselves, and for all those who love Him not, nor adore Him.

To this effect we ought, according to Father Piny, to apply ourselves in the beginning to make the following acts. First, we place ourselves in the presence of God. And as it is a

truth of faith that the infinite Majesty of God and the whole adorable Trinity fills all things, we should make an act of faith in this truth that God is as really present in us and in all places as He is in Heaven. After this act of faith in the presence of God we ought to make an act of abandonment of ourselves into His paternal care, protesting with our whole heart that we abandon ourselves to His holy will, and that we are there to love and adore Him, for ourselves and for all those who love Him not and adore Him not. After that we have only to remain in peace and silence, occupying ourselves with this loving remembrance of God present in us, and in this sentiment of abandonment and resignation which we make to Him of our all.

We ought to be convinced that this will we have to be there in order to love God is a true love, and that whatever distraction we can have, provided that we always retain this will, we do not cease to love Him. This interior silence is not idleness. On the contrary, the soul is more occupied than ever; but she perceives it not. She practises in an excellent manner the three theological virtues; faith,

since she believes God present as really within herself as in Heaven; hope, since she would not remain in this state if she did not hope to please God by it; charity, since she does all she can to make God loved by all, and since she remains resigned in His paternal hands, wishing and desiring only the accomplishment of His will, which is an act of love.

We also practise all the moral virtues; justice, by the gift we make of ourselves to God, not only at the beginning, but during the whole time of prayer; prudence, in not placing our trust in ourselves, in our lights, in our will, but in the divine and paternal Providence to which we wholly abandon ourselves; fortitude, since without allowing ourselves to be cast down and discouraged, we persevere in prayer in spite of aridities, fatigues, temptations, and distracting thoughts, which cease not to persecute us cruelly; a loving patience, since we bear all those pains in view of the will and good pleasure of God; humility, since it seems to the soul that she does nothing and since she believes herself fit for nothing, and that if she has anything of good in her it comes from God.

II

We can again render God interiorly present to us by a total abandonment of ourselves to His divine will. This we can do as follows, in the words of Father Piny: There is no doubt that acquiescence in the divine will is an excellent manner of rendering God present to us. The Royal Prophet speaks of it when he says that his greatest consolation in this life is to adhere and to hold himself united to God by a humble submission to the orders of His divine will: *"Mihi autem adhaerere Deo bonum est,"* he says; "it is good for me to adhere to God." A soul cannot acquiesce in the will of God without thinking that it is God who wishes it; without wishing it because God wishes it; consequently, without being present to Him, and without His being present to her, not solely by reason of His immensity, which renders Him present everywhere, but also by reason of that special presence of which the Apostle speaks when he says that it is in those who know Him by faith that He dwells most particularly. "Christ," he says, "dwells by faith in our hearts." And it is principally in those who live in the love of His good pleasure and

of His will that He delights to remain; as it is also in Him that they remain by this same love. "He who abideth in charity, abideth in God, and God in him."

In fact, what union more intimate with God in this life and more capable of rendering Him interiorly present than to wish all that He wishes by this continual acquiescence to all His orders, to will only what He wills, and in what He wills, to wish it only because He wishes it!

This is not only to be conformed to what God wills, not only to be deiformed by a happy transformation of our will into His; it is the having in this no longer only God alone and His will to reign in our hearts and in our wills. This manner of rendering God present is one of the most salutary, the most holy, and the most sanctifying: since every other presence of God without this acquiescence in the divine will is a presence without union. On the contrary, this presence by acquiescence in the divine will effects that not only is God in us, since His will, which is one with Himself, is found there; but, furthermore, that there is nothing in us which is not of God, since our will, the sole thing that is our own, is shut

out by this disposition of acquiescence in the divine will.

We can without doubt have the presence of God in us by that fixed and loving gaze or experimental certitude of His greatness which renders Him present everywhere, by the knowledge that we are in God and have God in us; but it is certain also that we can render Him interiorly present to us by this acquiescence in the divine will. If it were possible that God were not present everywhere, He would, nevertheless, be interiorly present in the soul abandoned to His will: since He loves those who love Him, and infinitely more than they can love Him ("I love those who love me"), and since we cannot love without being in what we love. "One is more where he loves," says St. Thomas, "than where he lives." God who dwells more specially in the temples that are consecrated to Him, delights to dwell in the soul abandoned to His will. This soul is a temple and a sanctuary which is consecrated to Him by humility in its foundations and by charity in all its interior. God defends and preserves this mystic temple by a very special protection, and it is, in fact, an anticipated paradise.

Let us say, then, that there is no interior disposition more perfect, more advantageous, more sanctifying, more consoling than this presence of union by acquiescence in the divine will. Let us say, also, that there is no presence of God more easy to obtain, since it is only to allow God to act by a loving abandonment and a tranquil acquiescence in His will. He is "the Father of mercies and the God of all consolation."

III

We can render God interiorly present to us once again, by the pain we feel at not preserving the remembrance of Him. The presence of God, and the loving remembrance of God present, is to us, according to St. Thomas, so necessary that we have need only to never lose the sight of this adorable presence to never sin. We must believe that Divine Providence gives us the power never to lose the sight of God's presence if we wish it. This providence would be wanting to us if the remembrance of God's presence were not always in our power. Now it is certain that we have nothing in our power except what is in our will, and for all the rest, there is nothing more assured. Experience

teaches us every day that the mind and the imagination, which are the two powers the most flexible and the closest to our will, often wander without its being in our power to control them. If it is true that we are wanting in the remembrance of God's presence only because we will it not, who does not see that it is a remembrance of God present, to be really pained at not remembering Him often? The pain we feel at not remembering Him as often as we would wish to, is a most evident proof that we truly wish to remember Him. And as to this interior remembrance, to wish is to have; the Providence of God having given the power to wish.

"The Holy Ghost tells us always to seek the presence of God: 'Seek His face always.' Now, as we seek only that we may find, we would seek in vain if we had no hope of finding. But in recommending us to seek this adorable presence always, God has supposed that we shall have been in continual pain at not seeing the divine face which we seek. And as the pain which the soul feels at finding herself separated from Him whom she loves, is a certain sign that she loves truly; and as love effects a union with the beloved object; and as one possesses

and is possessed by the beloved object; by the fact that we seek always we have always the presence of a loving union; we never forget, since we seek always, and God is always forward in our remembrance, since He is there in such a manner as to make Himself sought always and to hold us in pain through the fear of not remembering Him sufficiently.

"We must not, then, withdraw from prayer, since it is then that perhaps we make it better than ever, by remaining thus a victim of love *by consenting* to all the distractions that God permits us to suffer during the time of prayer. Yes, it is then more than ever that we advance in the spirit of true prayer, since the spirit, the end, and the essence of true prayer is nothing else than an intimate union of the soul with God by a perfect conformity of our will to His; and since our will is never more united to God's will than when it is faithful to this prayer of a victim; and since it abides in it to be immolated, sacrificed, and destroyed in all that our will could yet desire on the subject of its prayer."

Such, according to Father Piny, are the three different ways in which we can make God interiorly present to us; and although we can

employ views of faith in meditation and in affective prayer, nevertheless, if the attraction of grace conducts us to the simple and affectionate regard of God present, these different manners of rendering God interiorly present to us are particularly useful, because of the simplicity which is one of the distinctive characteristics of this prayer.

NINTH CONFERENCE

A Practical Method of Making the Prayer of Recollection

After having learned some of the ways of disposing ourselves for the prayer of recollection, we will go on to study the practical method of making the prayer as described by St. Teresa in "The Interior Castle of the Soul." This method comprises the two periods of the prayer of recollection, and it may very well follow the classic division of the preparation, the body of the prayer and the end.

The first period is characterized by the activity of the soul.

I

The Preparation

1. *The pious desires of the soul.* "Souls that have arrived at the third Mansions . . . desire ardently to enjoy their hours of recollection.

As they would not wish for anything in the world to commit a mortal sin, or even a deliberate venial fault; as besides they make a good use of their time and of their goods, they are impatient to see closed on them the door of the King's palace, of whom on a just title they repute themselves the vassals."

2. *The soul puts herself in the presence of God in the attitude of a poor beggar and humbly awaits His response.* "This recollection being a disposition to hearken to the divine way, the soul . . . ought to avoid reasoning as much as she can and hold herself attentive before God and consider Him operating in her. But if the Lord has not caused the soul to pass from this recollection to spiritual inebriation, I scarcely know how she can arrest the working of the understanding without there resulting from it more of damage than of gain. Her labor then ought to consist in holding out her hand as a poor mendicant before a great and rich emperor, in lowering her eyes and awaiting with humility."

3. *If God seems to respond favorably, the soul ought to gather herself more and more in the profound silence of her faculties.* "But if

God in His secret ways lets her know that He hears her, let her be silent: for He keeps her near Him, and let her even try, if she can, to prevent her understanding from acting."

4. *If, on the contrary, God does not respond to her pious desires, the soul must not strive to think of nothing, but she must continue to pray.* "But if she has reason to think that the King does not hear or regard her, let her not then commit the folly of remaining inactive. There is nothing more foolish than this inaction of the mind. The dryness of it is greater still. The imagination becomes more unquiet, because of the violence it causes to itself in trying to think of nothing. In this state God wishes us to address to Him our petitions and to consider ourselves in His presence. As for me, I cannot persuade myself that human industry can be of any help in things where God seems to have set a limit to our weakness, and which He has wished to reserve to Himself alone. There are a great number of other things that He leaves us in some sort to do, such as penances, good works, prayer, etc., where we can act according to the measure of our poor means."

II

The Body of Prayer

Combined Action of God and the Soul

1. *First discreet intervention of God, of which the soul often does not render an account to herself. God grants the soul spiritual consolations in reward for her efforts.* "God, just and merciful, who always gives above our deserts, does not fail to reward souls in those third mansions by according them *spiritual consolations,* which procure for them joys much greater than those that one obtains in the midst of the pleasures and amusements of life. But I do not think that He often gives them *divine tastes.* He does them this favor only rarely, and to the end of exciting them by the sight of the happiness of other mansions to neglect nothing to regain them once more."

2. *Laborious and conscious coöperation of the soul is sometimes rewarded by supernatural favors.* "Let us now speak of the difference between the *contentments* and the *tastes.* "In my opinion the *contentments* are sweetnessess that we procure for ourselves by

meditation and prayer, sweetnesses that come naturally from our interior, although with the succors of divine grace, without which we can do nothing. These *contentments* are a fruit of the virtues that we practise. We gain them in some sort by our own labor, and we have reason to rejoice at having so well employed ourselves. . . . As we see, these *contentments* . . . commence in us and terminate in God."

"The *tastes,* on the contrary, draw their principle from God, and make themselves felt in our soul, which is much more affected by them than by the *contentments* of prayer. . . . When it pleases God to accord us those supernatural favors, it is in the midst of an inexpressible peace, tranquillity, and suavity, which He produces in the inmost depths of our soul. . . . The suavity of those divine *tastes* makes itself felt through our entire being. The soul exhales, I know not what sweet odor, as if in her most profound depths there was a brasier on which were thrown exquisite perfumes. We see, it is true, neither the light of the fire nor the place it is in; but the odoriferous heat and smoke penetrate everywhere, and often, the body itself participates in it."

The second period is characterized by the

special action of God, a prelude of infused contemplation.

III

The End of Prayer

"Recollection also appears to me supernatural. In fact, it is not obtained either by retiring into obscure places or by closing one's eyes. It depends not on anything exterior. Even so is built up, without any effort on our part, the prayer of quietude."

1. *Intimate supernatural sense of the presence of God.* "It is a great grace that God gives us when He aids us to seek Him in our interior. There one finds Him better and more usefully than in creatures. . . . Do not imagine that we come to Him by the understanding, by trying to think that God is in us; or by the imagination, by representing to ourselves God within us. This is good without doubt, and an excellent manner of meditating, since it is true that God *is* in us; but this manner of recollecting ourselves is in the power of each one with the help of grace. It is not thus with the recollection of which I speak. For sometimes, even before one has the thought of raising his

mind to God, the powers of the soul together with the senses are already in this Interior Castle. One knows not how they have entered, or how they have heard the voice of the Divine Pastor, since no sound has struck their ear; but the soul in her depths feels herself gathered into herself with a singular suavity."

2. *Interior supernatural illuminations.* "When it pleases the Divine Majesty that our understanding take repose, He occupies it in another manner. He gives it lights so superior to the natural lights that the understanding is, so to speak, lost in them. Without knowing how, the soul finds herself more instructed than she was with all her efforts, which efforts, for the rest, can only avail to hurt her. Thus, since God has given us the faculties to act, and since the labor of each one of them has its reward, instead of captivating them by a sort of enchantment, let us allow them to acquit themselves of their office until it pleases God to entrust to them another more elevated."

3. *Loving aspirations in the repose of the faculties.* "In my opinion, what best benefits the soul whom our Lord has deigned to place in this abode is what I have said. Without violence, without noise, she ought to try to arrest

the activity of the understanding; but let her not try to suspend it any more than the memory; for it is good to recollect both that God is present and what is this great God. If what she experiences interiorly enraptures her, let it be so; but let her not inquire what enraptures her, for it is by the will of God that it happens to her. Thus let her enjoy it in peace and be content to breathe from time to time some words of love to Him. For often in this state, the soul, without seeking it, finds herself without thought of anything. But this lasts but for a short time."

It is thus that the prayer of recollection, from the simple placing of oneself in the presence of God and from a short meditation, evolves into a prayer of passive recollection, the beginning of infused contemplation.

It is important to read these passages of St. Teresa over again, in order to be penetrated with them, and to live them in some sort when we desire to practise the prayer of recollection. It seems useless to give a more ample explanation, which could only obscure the clear thought of the Saint.

TENTH CONFERENCE

Contemplation—Its First Degree

I

1. In former conferences we treated of meditation or mental prayer in general, and we studied, (1) the method of making it, and (2) how it may be practised with success by even the most simple and unlettered. We further treated of affective prayer. The prayer of the heart and of its excellences, and, lastly we treated of the prayer of recollection. To-day we will occupy ourselves with the consideration of that more elevated and refined form of prayer called contemplation.

Now this is a form of prayer which many do not understand—think, in fact, its practice belongs peculiarly to those who have reached the higher ways of the mystic life and of consummated perfection. It is consoling and most delightful to know that this way is not for-

bidden, nay, that it is easy and accessible to the most simple and lowly,—to every sincere worshipper of Jesus Christ.

What then is contemplation? It is described by St. Thomas to be "a simple sweet and tranquil gaze upon truth, terminating in love." This gaze is not a mere human study, such as the act of the theological student. It proceeds from the principle of love and terminates in love. Charity is the beginning and the end of it.

As such it forms one of the principal parts of ordinary meditation,—the part to which all the preceding parts of reasoning and discussion tend, and from which the chief fruits of meditation—resolutions, affections, and love, —proceed. For, as St. Thomas says after St. Denis: "There is this difference between man and an angel that the angel knows objects and discerns truth by a simple sweep of his intellect; whilst man arrives at this knowledge and this simple view of truth only as the result of many different acts." This is so true that if you consider the perfection of the contemplative act, it consists in a single act, which is the simple contemplation of truth. But if you consider the acts which precede this simple view

and which conduct to it, they are many. Some establish the principles on which the contemplation of truth is founded; while others form many reasonings on those principles, in order to discover the truth; finally, the last act, which is the complement of all that precedes, is the actual contemplation of truth."

2. Contemplation is ordinary or extraordinary. Ordinary contemplation is one of the important parts, as we have explained, of meditation or mental prayer.

Extraordinary, which is also called infused, passive, or supernatural contemplation is a purely gratuitous gift of God, by which the soul, having been made just and purified, is raised, more passively than actively, above the ordinary manner of knowing, and receives such abundant, pure, and vivid light that it is introduced so to speak into a superior spiritual region, where by a look excessively simple and ardently affective it contemplates heavenly and divine things.

Generally speaking, the gift of extraordinary contemplation is accorded only to perfect souls, who have applied themselves to meditation and the practice of virtue for a long time, and have excelled in passive trials. Neverthe-

less, God distributes His gifts to whom He wills, and when He pleases. He occasionally calls to extraordinary contemplation souls less prepared and less advanced in virtue. Such is the teaching of the Holy Fathers and mystic doctors, and in particular of St. John of the Cross.

3. Again, ascetic writers give us in their writings the distinction of contemplation by way of affirmation, and contemplation by way of negation. Contemplation by way of affirmation is that which sees in God all the perfections we find in creatures in an eminent degree.

Thus, when we regard the beauty of a flower, the sweetness of music, the majesty of a mountain, the glory of sunshine, the grandeur of the ocean, the depths of the heavens, our mind spontaneously rises to the contemplation of the grandeur of the Creator of those wondrous things, judging that every cause must possess the perfections of its effects. And thus we are drawn to the contemplation of the sweetness and harmony of God's Being, the beauty of His Essence, His majesty, His glory, His power, His immensity, which is infinite and stretches on to eternity. This is

contemplation by way of affirmation; for our mind affirms of Him that He is most wise, most holy, most just, most perfect; nay, that He is the source and principle of all perfections.

Contemplation by way of negation is that which considers Him as surpassing all the perfections that can be seen or known in creatures, and which acknowledges that He is infinitely above all that we can fancy or conceive.

Mystic authors sometimes compare contemplation by affirmation to a painting, where the artist adds to the canvas color on color, in order to arrive at a reproduction of the object desired; and contemplation by negation to a carving or sculpture, where the artist cuts away until the object arrives at final perfection.

"In the mysterious language of the Holy Books," says St. Denis the Mystic, "the adorable and super-essential nature of our blessed God is named sometimes 'Word,' 'Intelligence,' 'Essence,' to express His reason and His wisdom. His existence, so sovereignly essential and the sole true cause of all existences, is compared to 'light' and called 'life.' But although this noble and pious manner of speak-

ing appears to suit better than purely material symbols, it is, nevertheless, far from representing the divine reality, which surpasses all essence and all life, which no created light enlightens, and to which no reason or intelligence whatever can approach. Often, taking the opposite course and elevating our thought, the Scriptures call this substance 'invisible,' 'immense,' 'incomprehensible,' thus indicating what it is not; and those words seem to me more worthy, for if we put trust in our holy and traditional teachings, although we do not know this super-essential, infinite, incomprehensible, ineffable Being, nevertheless, we say with truth that He is nothing of all that which is. We ought to attribute to God and to affirm of Him what is positive in beings, since He is the cause of them; or, better still, deny it radically, since He is infinitely superior to them, as long, moreover, as the negation does not contradict the affirmation, and as this supreme nature is above all, above all negation as above all affirmation."

Thus, according to the teaching of St. Denis, we arrive at the knowledge of God by way of affirmation and by way of negation. On earth the most perfect and sublime way is

without contradiction that which proceeds by negation.

II

1. A no less celebrated division of contemplation is that which is understood by the three motions; the straight, the oblique, and the circular. This division of contemplation seems singular at first sight, but is in reality very simple and natural. All that can be said of mental prayer is comprised and abridged in this division, generally admitted by all mystic writers. We find the origin and outline of it in St. Denis, the earliest mystic writer, though handled somewhat obscurely by him.

St. Thomas lays hold of the thought of St. Denis, but only to develop it and render it more gripping. He observes that the operations of the understanding, in which contemplation essentially consists, are called motions by philosophers. For, we arrive by sensible things at the knowledge of things intellectual. Now sensible operations do not take place without motion. It is for this reason that we call motions by analogy the operations of the mind, and that prayer becomes a motion, an elevation of the soul to God. Of all corporal motions the first and the most perfect are local.

This is why the principal intellectual operations of contemplation are described after their resemblance to corporal motions. These motions are of three sorts: the straight, the oblique, and the circular.

"The first degree of contemplation, or the straight motion, consists in this," according to St. Thomas, "that the soul rises from sensible and exterior things to the knowledge of things invisible, by analogy to a straight motion which goes directly from one point to another. The straight motion represents to us the first and most imperfect manner of contemplation. By it we rise from visible things to invisible ones, and even to God Himself, taking occasion to know, love, and adore Him from all things in creation, which represent Him to us as in a mirror. The soul sees vestiges of the divine perfections impressed on all beings, and in tranquilly following those vestiges, she runs, she goes straight to Him without stopping, until she has found Him. It is thus that the spouse in the Canticle addresses herself to all nature, to heaven and earth, to find her Beloved, this adorable Word, after whom she sighs, and says: 'Have you seen Him whom my soul loveth?' They answer, each in turn, and all to-

gether: 'He made us, and not we ourselves.'

2. "The gift of knowledge answers to the first degree of contemplation. It would have us look upon all creatures as images of God, and consider them, not in themselves, but with regard to Him who created them. It would have the soul taste and feel that He alone is beautiful in all the objects that we see, and it would have us seek Him alone and contemplate Him alone in all His works.

"In its turn the beatitude of those who are filled with a holy sorrow responds to this gift, because a soul enlightened with the gift of knowledge and feeling how often she has become attached to creatures, instead of making use of them in order to raise herself to God, weeps over the fault she has committed in fixing her affections on copies instead of seeking the original. A soul thus touched goes farther still, and recognizing that all creatures are but feeble representations of the perfections which exist in God in all their plenitude, she sighs and groans, till at last she arrives at that blessed state in which David was when, transported with sorrow and love, he exclaimed that his tears were his bread day and night, whilst it was said to him daily: 'Where is thy God?' "

ELEVENTH CONFERENCE

The Second and Third Degrees of Contemplation

1. The second degree of contemplation, or the "oblique motion," consists in this, that the soul makes use by reasoning of the lights that God gives her under the veil of sensible figures. It was this that occurred to Isaias, who saw God under the figure of a King seated on a high throne. It is called *"oblique"* because it has something of the unity of the "circular motion" by the lights the soul receives from God, and something of the "straight motion" by reason of the variety attendant on sensible things—a thing that made St. Denis say that the soul in this motion was enlightened by the *divine science* according to its capacity, not by intuition and in unity, but by reasoning and deduction, and by operations complex and necessarily multiple.

This second motion is more perfect than the first, and it unites the soul more intimately

with God. It is an oblique motion which participates of the circular, because it approaches from the center. The soul then raises herself to God as it were with extended wings, and soars up to Him in order to contemplate those ineffable perfections of the Godhead that faith has revealed to her. But not being able to know them well in themselves, she contemplates them in the mysteries of the Incarnation, which show them to her in a sensible manner. For, as St. Paul says: "The grace," that is, "the mercy of our Saviour hath appeared on earth." In fact God's mercy was almost unknown to men; it was hidden in Heaven; and now it appears visibly in the mystery of God made man. All the works of our Saviour are a revelation of God's mercy. It is for this reason that Scripture gives Incarnate Wisdom three qualities, which comprise all that is necessary to make known an object perfectly. "She is (1) the brightness of Eternal Light; (2) the unspotted mirror of God's Majesty; (3) "the image of His goodness" (Wisd. viii, 26). Yes, Jesus Christ, the Word Incarnate, throws a concentrated light upon the divine perfections; He reflects them as in a mirror before the eyes of men; and He is Himself the Image which

represents them. All the works of His Sacred Humanity, therefore, manifest the perfections of God.

It is thus that the soul, not being able to see the divine perfections in themselves, reflects upon the mysteries of faith in which she discovers visibly all those perfections. Then she admires, she adores, she loves all the excellences which she sees and seems to touch in the mysteries of religion.

This brings home to us what an instrument of prayer and praise we have in the contemplation of the mysteries of the Rosary. Here as in a wondrous drama the scenes of our Lord's early life, of His Passion and crucifixion, and of His risen life are set before us evoking in us sentiments of love and thanksgiving and praise and raising us to the perfection of prayer as far as it can be obtained in this world.

The gift of *wisdom* responds to the second degree of contemplation, where the soul lifts herself up to God to contemplate His perfections. But not being able to see them in themselves, she reflects on the mysteries of the life of Christ, and the other truths of faith, where those perfections are revealed in a sensible

manner. The soul in this state contemplates all the great mysteries, not in a cold and sterile manner, and by a pure speculation of the mind. This would be only the wisdom of the philosopher, and not the gift of the Holy Ghost; but she contemplates them with love and suavity. She feels them; she tastes them; and by this intimate experience she feels herself lifted to a sweet and ardent contemplation, accompanied with so great a certitude that it seems to her that she sees the mysteries openly, and that she touches, so to speak, the divine perfections by having a knowledge as clear and perfect of them as one can have it on earth. For this reason the seventh beatitude, that of the peace-makers, corresponds to the gift of wisdom; because man, when his mind is illuminated with divine light and his heart filled with love and sweetness, submissively believes and ardently embraces whatever is proposed to him by faith. Moreover, the sensible experience God gives the soul of those eternal truths and divine mysteries, makes her enjoy a degree of peace and tranquillity which nothing in the world can disturb.

2. The third degree of contemplation, the circular motion, consists in this, according to

St. Thomas, that the soul lifts herself above herself and above all sensible things to contemplate God by a simple gaze, without recurring to the preceding discussion of reason. It is this that made St. Denis say that the circular motion consists in quitting exterior things in order to enter into oneself; in recalling one's intellectual faculties towards ideas of unity, so that the mind, enclosed as in a circle, cannot wander. Thus freed from distractions, it unites with the angels, marvellously lost in unity, and allows itself to be conducted towards the Supreme Truth.

For this reason, and because of its elevation, this degree is the most perfect of all. It lifts the soul to a manner of contemplation which is peculiar to the angels; for it is the privilege of the blessed spirits to be always lost in the unity of knowledge around the unchanging beauty and goodness of God. They form a crown surrounding Him on all sides, united to Him by a simple gaze of love, always equal and always the same, which shall never end.

3. Because this manner of knowing God (which is contemplation, properly so called) is extremely elevated, it needs exalted disposi-

tions to arrive at it. It requires, first, that a soul love retreat, and that she have a great separation from the world; that she quit all exterior things which divide her; further, that she be recollected within herself; that she remove the multitude of thoughts, discussions, and reasonings, which only occupy her mind and prevent her from uniting herself to God and to see and know Him as much as she can with the succors of His grace. Then she arrives at the simple knowledge and gaze of Eternal Truth, to whom she unites herself immediately as to her center.

The gift of understanding responds to the third degree of contemplation, where the soul by a simple gaze and without reasoning attaches herself solely to God. For the property of the human mind is to know objects and to penetrate into their nature by their properties and qualities. But where a new light shines more clearly on the same objects, and when it contemplates them by a simple look; this is no longer the ordinary manner of knowing which is proper to man. It is the privilege of the angels with proportion communicated to man. Now the gift of understanding attaches us by a simple gaze to the Eternal

Truth and to the mysteries God has revealed to us.

For this reason to the gift of *understanding,* which shows to a mind thus purified that which "eye has never seen," responds the sixth beatitude, that imparted to the "clean of heart." It is this purity of heart that God promises to reward by the happiness of seeing Him in heaven by the *Light of Glory,* and on earth by contemplation.

TWELFTH CONFERENCE

The Remote Preparation for Mental Prayer

I

1. We have now considered mental prayer in its essence, as an abstraction from material things and an elevation of ourselves to God by contemplation and love. We have considered the division of mental prayer into meditation, or that by way of discussion of our reasoning powers; affective prayer, or the prayer of abandonment to the good pleasure of God, the prayer of simplicity or recollection, and contemplation, or the simple gaze of the mind upon truth terminating in love. We have considered the three degrees of the latter, characterized respectively as the "straight motion," "the oblique motion," and "the circular motion," together with their excellence, especially that of the last degree. We have studied the end of mental prayer, which is none other than the increase of charity in the soul.

Let us now go on to study the dispositions that are required in one who would succeed in this, the highest and most divine of the works that man is capable of rising to and accomplishing in this world.

These dispositions, or, in other words, the matter that forms the remote preparation for mental prayer and contemplation, are chiefly two: retirement from conversation with the world and all that goes under that name, and mortification.

Retreat and separation of oneself from sensible things are necessary in order to be able to give oneself to prayer, because a soul dissipated and entangled with a multitude of worldly affairs is unable to see the truth clearly and to hear the voice of God. Thus, interior souls, as the Bible says, "build themselves solitudes," to shield themselves from the preoccupations and troubles of the world; and not only do they separate themselves from these preoccupations and troubles, but they fly from them; and "it is thus," says St. Gregory, "that they lift themselves to the contemplation of the First Truth."

2. The primary condition for prayer and contemplation is, as I have said, flight from the

world and its entanglements. How the instinct of contemplatives backs up this thought is seen in the history of their lives, whether they belonged to the East or to the West, to the Old or to the New Dispensation. See it in the lives of the holy men of old, as portrayed in the pages of the Old Testament. What were the lives of an Elias, an Eliseus, a Jeremias, a John the Baptist, but lives separated from, and altogether foreign to, the ways of civil and community life, and wholly in touch with nature and the God of nature in the midst of a barren wilderness? See it again in the lives of the holy men and women of early Christian times. The lives of a St. Jerome, a St. Benedict, a St. Mary Magdalen, a St. Paul, and the Fathers of the Desert were wholly given to solitude and prayer, far away from the companionship of men and the vicissitudes of nations. There, out in the great desert, in caverns of the earth or in huts which they built for themselves in the deep wood, they spent their lives in prayer and communion with God, and it was their prayers and their heroic sacrifices that brought light and salvation to a degenerate world, given over to sin and ineptitude. See it, finally, in that wonder of Western Christian-

ity, the lives of the hermit saints of early Ireland. Is there an islet or an isolated promontory bordering on the Eastern Atlantic from the extreme Southwest of Ireland to the utmost Hebrides that was not peopled by generations of holy men who mingling their prayers and tears with the splash and roar of the ocean seemed to live but to proclaim the mystery of a God all-seeing, immense and eternal? Such are some examples of the instinctive love of solitude that takes possession of the souls of those who give themselves to prayer and contemplation.

The first thing to do, therefore, when a soul sincerely desires to give herself to God and to undertake the exercise of prayer, is to retire from the conversation of the world and to seek God in solitude, as far as duty and well-being permit.

II

1. The second thing that devotion inspires is self-denial. The soul remembers that all the evils of the past have come from the violence of the passions, and that what remains of those unsubdued passions is an invincible obstacle to true prayer. The passions prevent the opera-

tions of the mind and especially the religious soul in the exercise of prayer in three different ways.

First, because they divide the forces of the soul. The soul as a central source distributes its forces to all its faculties, in order that they may be able to produce their several operations. But being limited in its capabilities, when one of the powers applies itself with ardor to any work, it necessarily draws more force from the source, and thus there remains less for the other faculties, which become more languid in their actions. Now a power never acts with more vigor than when it is excited by some passion; and when the inferior powers are agitated and troubled by this motion, there no longer remains much force for the operations of the mind and will, in which contemplation essentially consists.

In the second place, the passions interrupt the operations of the mind by the contrariety of their objects. They draw and precipitate the soul towards the earth and sensual pleasures. The body is a weight which prevents the soul from lifting herself towards Heaven. How could she carry herself towards a spiritual good when the passions hurry her with violence and

add a still more impetuous motion towards the things of earth?

Finally, the passions prevent the application of the mind to prayer because of the violent impressions they make on the body itself, and this agitation fetters the reason and takes from it its freedom of action. Our judgment is always conformed to the disposition we find ourselves in.

We must conclude from all this that a soul troubled by the passions is not capable of occupying herself in prayer—a thing that demands great repose.

2. We must commence, then, by the mortification of the passions and make efforts to approach that state where temperance and fortitude acquire so great an empire that one almost forgets that he has passions, and where the moral virtues hold them in a just control. It is then that the soul, finding herself well purified, enters into a sweet commerce with God. "Blessed," says our Lord, "are the clean of heart: for they shall see God." "They shall see Him not only by the beatific vision and by the light of glory in Heaven," says St. Thomas, "but by contemplation here on earth."

Adam in the state of innocence enjoyed a

perfect contemplation, because all his passions were subjected to reason,—a thing which permitted his mind to apply itself with full liberty to the First Truth, and his will to taste without trouble the pleasure one feels in the possession of the Infinite Good. And so the more a soul has of innocence, the more she is established in this blessed repose, which one obtains by a severe mortification of his passions and by the rigors of a penitential life. *Grace alone* in the state of corrupt nature will not have sufficient force to do what grace did in Adam. We must come to its aid by overcoming the passions of our corrupt nature, and then grace and mortification will produce an image of man in the state of original innocence. Mortification, then, must establish concord between the soul and the body. The body must separate itself from sensual pleasures and submit itself to the soul. The flesh, delivered from the law of sin by the law of reason and the spirit of life, must be no longer a "body of corruption," but flesh and soul must unite to experience heavenly consolations which the most amiable sight of God imparts, and in order that the soul may share with the body the pleasure with which she is filled.

The chief disposition for entering into the

Interior Life and contemplation is incontestibly the practice of mortification, but a true and solid mortification, which causes the body to suffer without sparing, not an imaginary mortification of the passions which spares the body. "We must," says St. Paul, "crucify the flesh with its lusts and concupiscences," and it is an illusion to think that one can repress the passions without making the body suffer, for we can have no true mortification when we refuse nothing to nature.

It is easy to conclude from all these reasonings that the character which most distinguishes true from false contemplation is the inclination or the aversion one has for the mortification of the soul and of the body; for interior mortification, as it is called, will be only an illusion if it is not accompanied by mortification of the body.

We are far from putting aside, as can be seen from the above, interior mortification; but we insist, within the limits of discretion and the duties of our state, upon the necessity and importance of bodily mortification as a preparation for mental prayer.

THIRTEENTH CONFERENCE

The Acquired Prayers of Quietude and Union

I

1. We shall study to-day the acquired prayers of quietude and union.

The first questions to be answered are: Are there acquired prayers of quietude and union? and if so, in what do they consist?

As to the acquired prayer of quietude, most mystic writers affirm that there is, and we believe this opinion to be well founded. All the world is of one accord in admitting ordinary or acquired contemplation. Now, according to St. Thomas, all contemplation, even that of natural truths, and with much greater reason that of divine and supernatural things, necessarily produces a certain repose in the soul.

Quietude in contemplation flows (1) from the sweetness and perfection of the act; (2), from the sublimity of the dispositions or habits, that is to say, from the gifts of the Holy Ghost

which are the formal and immediate principles of it; and, lastly, from the perfection of the object contemplated; and this applies in a certain measure to ordinary and acquired as well as to extraordinary contemplation. Hence we must conclude that ordinary contemplation has its proper and particular quietude.

2. Let us now go on to show in what consists this prayer of repose and in what manner it ought to be practised.

The soul has in the depth of her being, as all created things have, a strong and violent inclination to carry herself to God, and this for three reasons: because God is (1) the principle that produced her; (2) the center who preserves her, and (3) the end which draws her. And this inclination is impressed so deeply in her nature that it remains even in the damned. One of the most cruel torments they suffer for all eternity comes from this that they feel within themselves an obstinate malice which makes them hate God as their Judge, whilst their nature constrains them to love Him as the Universal Good.

Man, drawn towards God by a natural inclination, would experience nothing but the greatest pleasure in entertaining himself with

Him. Whence, then, comes that strange disorder that man, a true image of God and tending to Him with so strong an inclination that the fires of hell are not capable of breaking or diminishing it,—whence comes it, I say, that man cannot rest peaceful and tranquil before his God when he is at prayer? It was not thus with Adam in the state of innocence, since in that happy time it would have been as easy for him to enter into the most profound contemplation as it is for us to go to sleep. In the first man before the Fall, by the privilege of innocence, all the passions and inferior powers were submissive to the empire of reason, and this inclination towards God found no obstacle. Adam would never have felt a greater pleasure than in entertaining himself with God. We can then say that his prayer would have been a prayer of quietude and repose.

But in the state where we are, with our nature corrupted, all the powers of the soul are disunited, all our passions are in disorder and revolt; and thus the inclination of tending to God is, so to speak, bound, and this exercise, so sweet in itself, becomes insupportable. Two evil principles cause this difficulty in us: the rebellion of our passions and the unruliness of

our imagination. It is evident that the violence of our passions prevents the application of the soul to prayer and contemplation, as I showed in our last conference.

As to the disorder of the imagination, who can comprehend it? Of all the powers of the soul there is none that more visibly bears within it the penalty of original sin.

The difficulty we have in applying ourselves to prayer comes, then, from these two sources of dissipation.

But when the soul has by a long course of discipline moderated her passions and put bounds to her desires, so that she has turned wholly to God, loves only Him, fears nothing so much as to displease Him, has no other joy than to possess Him, no other sadness than to have offended Him; in fine, when the soul, accustomed to mortify herself, participates somewhat in the empire that man had in the state of primeval innocence; and when in his interior, which is a little world in itself, the will as first motor draws after it all the other powers, prayer becomes very sweet, and the soul applies herself to it with extreme pleasure. There are no longer any great difficulties to conquer. Virtue becomes strengthened. It has so com-

pletely triumphed that it can act on the inferior appetites and passions and turn all their motions towards God. It is then that one can say in truth with David: "My heart and my flesh have exulted in the living God."

We can practise in this state the prayer of repose, because all is peaceful within us, and our passions, our imagination, our heart, and our mind, tend to God. Nothing troubles this exercise, and all is gone through in great suavity and peace. The soul "tastes and sees how sweet it is to converse with Divine Wisdom."

II

1. We come now to the last point to be considered in regard to the subject of acquired prayer; namely, the acquired prayer of union.

It is admitted that there is a prayer of union, to be attained by the fidelity of the soul in corresponding with the graces of ordinary contemplation. In this prayer the powers of the soul are not suspended. The ineffable joys and consolations of the passive union are not yet accorded. Meanwhile, there is a *fruitive* union, and the soul feels and tastes God within her.

Blessed Albert the Great admits in very ex-

plicit terms the possibility of this acquired prayer of union. After having enumerated the ineffable spiritual sweetnesses which the soul tastes in the contemplation of the splendor of the Word Incarnate, Wisdom infinite and harmonious, and in the infinitely sweet and loving communications of the Incarnate Word who penetrates the heart by His grace and by the remembrance of the mysteries of His mortal life, he hesitates not to say that in what concerns this delicious and *fruitful* contemplation of the Word the preliminaries of intellectual knowledge are not omitted. He does not exclude without doubt the possibility of an infused contemplation; but he shows us step by step the consistent march of the soul in order to arrive at the acquired prayer of union; from the exterior senses, to the imagination; from the imagination, to reason; from reason, to *knowledge;* from knowledge to the higher gift of *understanding;* from understanding to *wisdom,* excessive and experimental;—nothing is forgotten.

He goes even to say that it is a beginning of Vision, and the union of Heaven. We taste and see it. Blessed Albert the Great with the authority of his learning and experience affirms

with great precision the possibility of the acquired prayer of union.

Abnegation of the will and perfect conformity to the will of God always accompany the acquired prayer of union.

But let us allow to speak, St. Teresa, who has left us admirable pages on this subject. "There is," she says, "no Christian who with the aid of grace may not arrive at true union, provided that he forces himself to renounce his own will to attach himself wholly to the will of God. Oh, how many there are who say they are, and firmly believe themselves to be, in these dispositions; and I assure them that if they are they have obtained from God all that they could desire. They need not put themselves to pain of this (*i. e.,* passive) union so delicious. For what is best in it proceeds from the submission of our will to God.

And it is even impossible to arrive at the passive union if one possesses not the latter: I mean to say, the entire submission of our will to that of God. How desirable is this latter union? Oh, happy is the soul that possesses it!

Know, my daughters, that for this union of pure conformity to the will of God it is not

necessary that the powers be suspended. God who is all powerful has a thousand ways of enriching souls and of conducting them into those abodes without making them pass, by this short way of which I speak, raising them to this intimate, that is, passive, union with Him, where after some moments they come out all transformed.

But remark well that in every case this mystic worm (*i. e.,* our own will) dies, and that in this union of pure conformity to the divine will its death must cost us very dear.

In fact, in this supernatural union where one tastes in God such great delights, the happiness felt in living a life so new aids much in causing this worm to die; whilst in the union of conformity the soul without going out of the ordinary life must slay herself.

I avow, my daughters, that this latter state (*i. e.,* of acquired conformity to the will of God) is much more painful than the former (*i. e.,* the passive union) : but the reward of it will be much greater if we come out victorious from the combat. And we shall come out victorious without doubt provided that our will be united to that of God. This is the union that I have desired all my life and that I have always

asked of our Lord. It is also that which is the most easy to know, and the most secure. What is the will of our divine Master? It is that we be made so perfect that we become only one thing with Him and with His Father, as He Himself has asked it for us: "I in them, and Thou in Me, that they may be perfect in one."

But consider, I pray you, how many things we need to arrive at this state. For this union of conformity it is not necessary that God accord us great delights. It suffices that He has given us His Son to teach us the way. Think not, however, that this conformity to the will of God obliges us when we lose a father or a brother to be insensible to it, or to suffer with joy the pains and maladies that come upon us. That is good, but often it is the effect of a wisdom all human. God demands of us only two things in those emergencies; the one, to love Him: the other, to love our neighbor. It is then for this that we ought to labor; in fulfilling those faithfully we shall do His will, and we shall be united to Him." (The Interior Castle.)

And now as to the principal effects of this acquired prayer of union. Although it does not produce all the effects of the prayer of

passive union; nevertheless, this prayer carries with it very great rewards: a profound peace; a certain participation of celestial beatitude, and of the unchangeableness of God; lastly, something altogether supernatural and divine in the practice of the virtues. Could it be otherwise? The perfect conformity to the will of God, inseparable companion of this prayer, is it not the key to all the treasures of heaven?

2. It might be asked, what is the foundation and the basis of the acquired prayers of quietude and of union? I answer, affective prayer and the prayer of active recollection may be considered that foundation.

In fact the soul drawn by grace lifts herself from meditation to affective prayer; from affective prayer to the prayer of active recollection; and if this prayer of active recollection or of loving attention to God present is sufficiently perfect and fervent, it is the prayer of repose that begins; shortly after, it is the prayer of union.

The great principle of the Interior life which conducts to union is perfect conformity to the will of God.

To allow God to act, this is the great secret

of true prayer. We have shown it in affective prayer; in the prayer of active recollection; and more particularly in the prayer of union.

Abandonment to the good pleasure of God, let us say it once and for all, ought then to be the chosen exercise of souls desirous of making serious progress in the life of prayer.

FOURTEENTH CONFERENCE

The Degrees of Prayer (I)

First Degree

St. Gregory observes that in the moral order one does not leave on a sudden the exercises of an ordinary Christian life to arrive by a single step at the summit of perfection. Merit, which supposes perfection, demands considerations that prepare this spiritual ascension progressively.

It is the same with prayer. The soul cannot, except by a very special grace of God, arrive suddenly at the practice of eminent degrees of prayer, without being exercised for a time more or less long in the practice of the inferior degrees.

It is of the degrees of prayer and of their relation to the degrees of the spiritual life to which the soul has attained that I wish to speak to you this morning. But first let me recall to you what we understand by the spiritual life.

The spiritual, otherwise called the interior

life, considered in its ascetic and mystic developments, is nothing else but the Christian life conducted to its highest perfection.

By Baptism the Christian strips himself of his evil nature in order to put on Jesus Christ and to be transformed into Him. This spoliation and this transformation recall the death to the world and the passions, the spiritual sepulchre of the soul, its resurrection and the enjoyment of this new life hidden with Christ in God.

Every Christian desirous of attaining the end of his vocation must reproduce in himself the mysteries of the life of the Saviour. Now the Christian cannot live the life of Christ and reproduce its mysteries, except by a constant increase of grace and a knowledge always growing more perfect of the Saviour, and this spiritual growth and knowledge of God is obtained chiefly by prayer. "Pray without ceasing," says St. Paul, "in all things giving thanks, for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus to you all." "In everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your petitions be made known to God." And according to St. Augustine, "he who knows how to pray well, knows also how to live well."

Thus the different degrees of prayer correspond in a certain fashion to the degrees of the spiritual life, and thereby to the perfection according to which the Christian life reproduces the life of Christ and its principal mysteries.

Behold why it is so important to determine with all possible exactitude the various degrees of prayer.

St. Teresa in her great work, "The Interior Castle of the Soul," teaches that there are eight of these degrees, which correspond roughly to the seven mansions or suites of apartments into which the castle is divided.

To-day let me summarize the teachings of this great mystic doctor on those degrees of prayer and their relations with the grades of perfection attained, otherwise designated the *mansions of the interior castle of the soul.*

II

The first degree is vocal prayer.

Vocal prayer is a conversation of the soul with God. It habitually employs articulate language. Although the use of words is not required for the essence of prayer, it is becoming to have recourse to it in certain circumstances,

for it excites interior fervor and enables us to render to God a more complete homage of our whole moral and physical being, and it procures for our soul that exterior expansion of which it has need in order to give a free course to the force of its love.

This first degree of prayer is that which beginners employ. They have need of cut and dried formulas to put themselves in relation with God. However, all vocal prayer is partially mental, for, as St. Teresa remarks, "Vocal prayer, like mental prayer, in order to merit this name, must be accompanied with consideration. When I see," she says, "a person who while praying considers neither to whom he speaks nor what he petitions, nor the distance that separates him from Him to whom he addresses himself, I cannot say that this person prays, although he may move his lips."

This first degree of prayer is that which St. Teresa designates as particularly in affinity with the dispositions of the soul that makes its entry into the first mansions of the spiritual castle of the interior life. "The entrance gate of this castle is, to my thinking, prayer and meditation. However much engaged in the world, those souls have good desires. From

time to time they recommend themselves to our Lord. They reflect on themselves, although only a little, hastily, and as it were by stealth. Each month they have certain days when they pray, but with a thousand affairs in their heads. They are so habitually attached to this world that their heart goes where their treasure is. Meanwhile, they wrench themselves from time to time from the tumult of the world to be alone, and surely it is a great thing for those souls to know themselves and to see that they take the road that leads to the gate of the castle. Finally, they enter into the first apartments of the ground floor. But they bring with them so many reptiles" (*i. e.,* passions, temptations, etc.) "that they cannot yet see the beauty of the edifice and taste of its sweetness and repose. Meanwhile, it is already much that they have cleared the threshold."

These words of the saint require no comment. It is then vocal prayer accompanied with a summary meditation on the importance of the Christian life, on our Lord, etc., that characterizes the first mansions or sets of apartments, beginning the spiritual life.

FIFTEENTH CONFERENCE

The Second and Third Degrees of Prayer

I

The second degree of prayer is discursive meditation properly so called.

Meditation, simply sketched in a rudimentary form in the course of former elevations of the soul towards God, takes an aspect more clear and puts on a character more precise as soon as the soul has rendered an account of the necessity of prayer and of her approach towards God.

The mind fixes upon a subject of its choice in regard to its wants or the effort of its devotion. To the end of preparing the better to prosecute and to conclude with fruit this pious exercise, the understanding is inspired by certain useful lessons. It appeals to the imagination to establish "the place and circumstances favorable" to the development of the subject. It gives itself up to a series of arranged re-

flections, which form the woof of the meditation which it has care to embellish with tender sentiments sustained by the effort of the will. It arrives, finally, at the conclusion, which consists of praises, supplications, thanksgivings, and practical resolutions. *This is discursive prayer.*

Here especially an intellectual recollection is cultivated, during which the soul endeavors in a special manner to strengthen in herself her religious convictions and develop the spirit of faith. Love accompanies or follows these speculative considerations, but it plays only a secondary rôle.

The most habitual and the most opportune subjects are those that have relation to the eternal truths, to the more perfect knowledge of oneself, and to the mysteries of the life of Christ.

St. Teresa places this prayer at the beginning of the second mansions. "Let us speak now," she says, "of the souls that enter into the second mansions. . . . I have in view the souls who have begun to give themselves to prayer and who understand how important it is not to delay in the first mansions, but who have not sufficient courage to give them up en-

tirely, but return to them often, because they do not separate themselves from the occasions . . .

"But reason comes to their aid, divulging all the craft of the devil and showing that those worldly goods are nothing in comparison with the good to which they aspire. Faith teaches them what happiness will satisfy all their desires. The memory represents to them the term whence eventuate all earthly felicities. It places before their eyes the last moments of persons who had enjoyed all pleasures to satiety, the sudden deaths of some of them, and the oblivion into which they have fallen. It recalls to them people whom they had seen in the midst of prosperity, and who now, in the grave, are trampled under foot by the passers-by. It shows them their burial place, where they so often passed, and fixes their gaze on their body, which swarms with worms.

"These considerations bring the soul to enter into herself in order to know herself better and to render an exact account of her state. It would be folly to imagine that a soul can reach Heaven without penetrating beforehand into the most intimate depths of her being in order to know herself, without considering her mis

ery, the benefits received from God, and without often imploring the succors of His mercy.

"From thence the soul raises herself towards God; for has not our Divine Master said: 'No one can come to my Father except by me' and again: 'He who sees me, sees my Father'? If we never cast our eyes upon Him, if we do not consider the obligations we have to Him, and the death He endured for us, how can we know Him and labor in His service? What good is faith without works? What worth can works have if they are not united to the merits of Jesus Christ? Finally, if we do not consider all these things, who or what will be able to bring us to the love of the Divine Master?"

What simpler plan could one desire for a discursive meditation leading the soul insensibly to the most tender sentiments of regard towards the Saviour and thus preparing it for the third degree of prayer?

II

The third degree of prayer is affective prayer.

The soul, once profoundly seized with the great truths of religion, penetrated with the

mysteries of the life of Christ, carried away with the love of Him and of God, no longer has want in the same measure of previous considerations which put her in fervor. A rapid remembrance of the conclusions arrived at in former meditations, the attention firmly applied upon one of those truths, will suffice to evoke almost instantly the affections of the heart. The intuition of those sublime realities is so vividly present to the mind that in a moment the heart is touched, the action of the will goes to take the place of that of the intelligence. *This is affective prayer.*

St. Teresa speaks lengthily of this degree of prayer in her *Life,* and in *The Way of Perfection.* In the *Interior Castle* she contents herself with presenting this prayer as a conclusion of the preceding: "The will feels itself inclined to love Him in whom it discovers so many lovable traits, and at the remembrance of so many marks of love received it feels the want of responding to them. What in particular touches the soul is to see how this true Friend is always with her, never quitting her, accompanying her everywhere, giving her being and life."

This is the principal cause of that lively af-

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fection conducted by the intelligence which has made the soul discover the presence of God in her and which awakes her love for Him whom she possesses. This first impression of the presence and of the possession of God is destined to be accentuated, to be developed, and to prepare for the superior degrees of prayer in sowing the germ of contemplation.

Nevertheless, the saint warns the pious soul that she ought not to seek true interior consolation in those first degrees. "I have said, and I repeat it, that she must not dream of sweetnesses and delights in the beginning. It would be a very vulgar manner of commencing so great an edifice, and to build upon sand a house that will promptly fall to pieces. In acting thus she will have laid herself liable to disgust and temptations without end. The manna does not fall in those first mansions; we must penetrate farther in order to gather it."

There alone the soul finds all things according to her taste, because she wishes solely what God wishes. This is in fact one of the most important conditions to assure the progress of the soul in the spiritual ways and to enable her to raise herself gradually to the heights of a more perfect prayer.

Never forget this important truth: those who commence to give themselves to prayer ought solely to aspire to dispose themselves with courage and by all means possible *to conform their will to the will of God.*

Be assured that in this consists the most sublime perfection to which one can raise himself in the spiritual way. The more he practises this conformity, the more he receives from God, and the more also he progresses in this way. Don't believe that there are other secrets, or other unknown and extraordinary means of advancing; all our good is there.

SIXTEENTH CONFERENCE

The Fourth Degree of Prayer

I

1. The fourth degree of prayer is the prayer of recollection.

St. Teresa distinguishes *active recollection* from *passive recollection,* and in matter of fact, they are two different species of prayer, since the former is practically identical with *acquired contemplation,* and the latter is the first degree of *infused contemplation,* approaching to the *prayer of quietude.*

Meanwhile there is an intimate relation between those two species of recollection by reason of the divine *tastes.* On the one hand, those *tastes* are one of the characteristics of *passive* recollection and of *quietude;* on the other, they manifest themselves, although but rarely and by way of exception, in the course of *active* recollection. "God acts in this way," remarks Saint Teresa, "to the end of exciting

souls by the sight of the happiness of other mansions to neglect nothing in order to arrive there."

This is why we shall consider under one sole generic term this prayer of *recollection,* indicating, nevertheless, the characteristics proper to each of its phases.

St. Teresa speaks of active recollection especially in her *Way of Perfection,* but she makes allusion to it also in the *Interior Castle of the Soul,* where she mentions the *divine contentments* which seem to be sweetnesses that we attain to of ourselves, whereas the *tastes* come from God. The former are proper to souls that have arrived at the third mansions, whilst the *tastes* are favors received habitually by those who are in the fourth mansions.

When the soul has been for a long time faithful to prayer, when she is exercised in meditation and affective prayer, when she has acquired the habit of entertaining herself with our Lord, she commences to taste the first fruits of her spiritual labor.

"God, who is just and merciful and gives always above our merits, delays not to reward souls who have arrived at the third mansions with *interior contentments,* which make them

feel a joy infinitely greater than all the pleasures and all the diversions that this life could give."

Now, those *contentments* seem to be favors which we ourselves obtain by means of meditation and the prayers that we address to our Lord. They are happy feelings which appear to spring up from our nature, although with the succor of the grace of God; for without Him we can do nothing, and this is a truth that we must never lose sight of. These *contentments* are a fruit of the virtues that we practise. We attain to them in some sort by our own labor and we have reason for rejoicing at having employed ourselves so well. Those *contentments,* in place of dilating the heart as the *divine tastes* do, ordinarily contract it a little, without for all that diminishing the satisfaction felt at seeing that we perform our actions for God. They cause tears of sorrow to flow, which one would call sad and begotten of some degree of passion. But in reality, those tears proceed from the most tender sentiments of the heart. "If I began to weep in meditating on the Passion of our Lord," says St. Teresa, "I would never cease. If I wept over my sins,

it would be the same. In this our Lord gave me a great grace. . . . Sometimes nature, the disposition even in which we find ourselves, contributes to provoke those tears and desires.

"In fine, those *contentments,* in spite of the fact that there is a good deal of the natural in them, tend to terminate in God, and this is why we ought to esteem them highly. . . . Those sentiments of devotion are most often the portion of souls in the third mansions. They occupy themselves with them almost without ceasing to act by the understanding and meditating, and though they have not yet received the highest graces, they are in a good way.

"Meanwhile, they would do well to employ some time in producing and in offering to God divers interior acts of praise, admiration at His bounty, joy for that He is God, desire to see Him honored and glorified.

"To advance in the way, and to arrive at those mansions after which we sigh, the essential thing is not to think much, but to love much. . . . Do not imagine, nevertheless, that in order to love in this way you must never think of any other thing, and that all would be lost if you became a little distracted." All the

powers, in fact, may be occupied with God and recollected in Him whilst the imagination is disturbed.

Nevertheless, God sometimes accords to souls who have arrived at the third mansions much more precious favors,—those of *divine tastes*. "He does so with the end of exciting them by the sight of the happiness of other mansions to neglect nothing to arrive at them. These exceptional supernatural favors in the course of *active recollection* recall the spiritual joys more generally accorded in *passive recollection* and quietude. This is why this *active recollection* is sometimes designated as *acquired contemplation.*

II

2. By those *divine tastes* the Lord draws the soul from the ascetic to the mystic life and raises her at least in a passing way from meditation to contemplation. Recollection, *active* up to the present, becomes *passive* and entirely supernatural. In fact, these *divine tastes* proper to souls who have attained to the fourth mansions, bear an altogether different aspect from the benefits heretofore accorded. If they carry

themselves towards the same object, they are distinguished from them by their very special character and by the manner in which they act. After commencing affective prayer, the soul applies herself to seek God within herself and to enjoy His presence in very tender sentiments.

But the *divine tastes* come no longer from a natural effort. They proceed from God, who manifests Himself to the soul in a special manner, in which reasoning and the imagination have no part. "Do not fancy that one arrives there by the understanding, trying to think that God is in us, or by the imagination, representing Him within us. It is good, without doubt, it is an excellent manner of meditating, since it is true that God is in us; but this manner of recollecting oneself is in the power of each with the succor of grace. It is not thus with the recollection of which I speak, for sometimes, even before one has thought of raising his mind towards God, the powers of the soul together with the senses are already in the Interior Castle; like a hedgehog or a turtle they withdraw within themselves. He who employs this comparison ought to understand it. It does not appear to me altogether just; for those an-

imals withdraw within themselves when they like, whereas this recollection is independent of our will, and we can enjoy it only when it pleases God. If I am not deceived, He grants this grace only to persons who have renounced the world, if not in reality, because their state prevents them from doing so, at least in desire. He calls on them particularly to devote themselves to an interior life."

This recollection being a disposition to hear the divine voice, the soul ought to avoid reasoning with the understanding and hold herself attentive before God and consider Him operating in her; when it pleases His Divine Majesty that our understanding take repose, He occupies it in another way. He gives it lights so superior to natural lights that the understanding is, as it were, overwhelmed with them. Without knowing how, it finds itself more fully instructed than it was with all its efforts.

Without violence, without noise, the soul ought to try to arrest the activity of the understanding; but let her not try to suspend it, any more than the memory, for it is good that she remember both that God is present and who this great God is. If what she feels ravish her, let it be; but let her not try to understand what

ravishes her, for it is of His own will that God gives Himself.

Thus let her allow herself to rejoice in peace, and content herself to whisper from time to time some words of love to Him. For often in this state, the soul, without seeking it, finds herself without thought of anything. But usually this lasts for a short time. Thus the soul which, on entering into the third mansions (by prayer and *active recollection*), has been favored with *spiritual contentments,* receives also, although rarely, the signal favor of *divine tastes.* It is so to speak a call to the prayer of *passive recollection,* where are revealed in a weak and transient manner the great manifestations of infused contemplation; interior supernatural illumination, an intimate and experimental sense of the presence and of the possession of God, tender aspirations in the repose of the faculties.

It is then nearly always God seen, known, loved as in the beginnings of meditation and especially of affective prayer. But this knowledge and this love reveal a very special character, they are realized in a very distinct manner, and leave an unction the enjoyment of which is not comparable to any of those of

which the soul has had experience heretofore.

This character consists in this that the knowledge and the consciousness of the presence and possession of God are not limited to considerations of the mind or to pious affections, but are truly experimental and leave in the soul a living and unforgetable impression.

The *mode* is observed in this that the activity of the soul was evident before; whilst now, this activity diminishes insensibly to the point of disappearing more and more, to the end that the soul become almost entirely *passive* under the divine action, so that the act, instead of being done *modo humano, i. e.,* in a human way, under the influence of reason enlightened by faith, is produced *modo divino, i. e.,* in a divine manner, under the empire of the gifts of the Holy Ghost.

After this first experience the soul is ready for the mystic life and for the superior degrees of prayer.

SEVENTEENTH CONFERENCE

The Fifth and Sixth Degrees of Prayer

I

1. The last phase of the prayer of recollection has prepared the soul for a more intense divine action, which is revealed in the prayer of quietude.

St. Teresa opposes *quietude* to the prayer of *active recollection.* It is the prayer of *divine tastes,* compared to the prayer of *spiritual contentments.* It is the *second celestial water,* relatively to the *first celestial water.* The *contentments* commence in us and terminate in God. The *tastes* draw their principle from God and become felt in our soul.

The *prayer of quietude* is, properly speaking, the first step in the purely mystic ways characterized by the suspense or partial binding up of the powers.

"It does not seem to me," she says, "that the powers of the soul are united to God; it seems to me that they are solely (as it were) drunk

and stupefied by the marvels they have discovered. Nevertheless, just as we cannot arrest the motion of the heavens, so it is not in our power to arrest the motion of the imagination. We confound the powers of the soul with the imagination. Meanwhile, perhaps at the time that the soul is all united with God in the superior mansions, . . . it suffers, not without merit, from the ramblings of the imagination. But it seems to me that in this state the will ought to be united in some manner to that of God.

"In this prayer the understanding ceases to act, for the soul finds herself at the very source of this *celestial water*. It comprehends nothing of what takes place. It finds itself entirely forbidden and goes wandering on all sides without knowing where to stop, whilst the will remains so united to God that it cannot see this wandering without pain. But she ought to despise it. She could not occupy herself with it without losing a part of the happiness she enjoys. Let her, then, let go the understanding, and let her abandon herself entirely to love. The Divine Master will teach her what she ought to do then,—humble herself and give thanks."

It is then a passivity that announces itself on

the part of the soul and that begins to become more and more complete even to the highest degrees of prayer. This stupefaction of the powers, as we have already indicated, and as we shall expound at greater length later on, by no means implies "inactivity" of the powers. It is simply the "momentary impossibility" of using them on another subject than that to which they are fixed by the divine action and of employing another procedure than that to which they are subjected under the divine influence.

II

The sixth degree is the simple, mystic, semi-ecstatic union, the visit of the Celestial Spouse preparitory to the divine Espousals.

"I have treated at length of the *fourth mansions*" (the prayer of quietude), says St. Teresa, "because it is into them that, in my belief, the greatest number of souls enter. Those who pass on farther are rare, and I know whose fault it is. Most certainly it is not God's. After having granted so high a favor, He no longer ceases to lavish new ones, unless our infidelity stops them."

This prayer which St. Teresa describes un-

der the name of the *"third water"* is intermediate between quietude and full union. All the powers of the soul are seized simultaneously by the supernatural action and occupied in God; but the senses are not completely absorbed, but preserve a certain liberty of action.

"Do not imagine that this new prayer is, like the preceding one, a sort of drowsiness. I say drowsiness, because in the prayer of *divine tastes* or of *quietude* it seems that the soul is neither fully awake nor fully asleep, but simply slumbers. Here, on the contrary, the soul is fully asleep to the world and to herself. In fact, during the short time that the union lasts, she is so to speak deprived of every sentiment and cannot think of anything. Thus she has no need of an effort to suspend the activity of the intelligence, nay even of love. If she makes any act of love, she has not the sentiment of it. She knows neither what she loves nor what she wishes. In fine, she is, so to speak, absolutely dead to the things of the world in order the better to live in God. How sweet is such a death! It is a death, because the soul is insensible and a stranger to all the operations that she can exercise in the prison of the body; and it is a sweet death because the soul, with-

out being as yet detached from this terrestrial weight, seems to disengage herself from it to unite herself more intimately to God. I do not know whether in this state there remains to her enough of life to be able to breathe. I have thought of it often, and it appears to me, no; or at least, if she breathes, she is not aware of it. Her understanding would wish to employ itself in comprehending something of what takes place in her; but it cannot, and remains wholly suspended, with some vigor still perhaps, but incapable of the least external motion."

Thus a person sometimes falls into a weakness so profound that it appears, and that we call it, death.

EIGHTEENTH CONFERENCE

The Seventh and Eighth Degrees of Prayer

I

1. The seventh degree of prayer is characterized by its bringing about the full mystic union and the phenomenon of ecstacy.

The full mystic union is the *fourth celestial water*. It is distinguished from simple union by a still more complete absorption in God and the absolute alienation of the senses. It is accompanied by *extraordinary* favors; visions, revelations, divine touches, which are distinctive phenomena of the ecstatic state and belong to an altogether different order of graces.

God continues His calls in a thousand ways, full of goodness and delicacy. It is on the occasion of a vocal prayer, of an act of simple recollection, that He reveals His presence by a sweet odor which pervades the entire soul. In other circumstances they are words which now seem to come from the outside, now to be pro-

duced in the inmost region of the soul. Then there are visions, imaginative and intellectual.

When the soul enjoys these ecstasies our Lord sometimes discovers to her certain celestial secrets. Those intellectual visions are so sublime that the soul is without words to express them. "I hold for certain," says St. Teresa, "that our Lord treats the soul as His spouse and shows her a small part of the kingdom He has acquired."

It is in fact the epoch of the "Espousals." The Divine Lover ravishes the soul beyond herself. For, if the soul enjoyed her senses, at seeing herself so near His tremendous Majesty, death would very likely follow from the shock.

We speak of a true rapture, and not of those feminine weaknesses which we so easily take for ecstasies. Here are some forms of this rapture.

There is at first the *suspension of the senses.* This originates from a divine word that the soul remembers or that she has heard, sometimes even without being in prayer. . . . The soul is then inflamed and entirely renewed as the Phœnix, and she can piously believe that her sins are forgiven. . . . When the soul is thus purified, our Lord approaches in a mar-

vellous manner, of which but few have the secret.

Then there is a *more violent rapture*. It appears to the soul that she is, so to speak, snatched out of the body and entirely delivered to the arms of the Lord, who carries her where it seems good to Him, as long as it pleases not His Majesty to give her rest. . . . She knows not what becomes of her.

Finally, there is the *theft of the spirit*. Sometimes the soul is carried away by a sudden and rapid motion and with such rapidity that she is filled with a great fear, especially at the commencement. This motion is such that it seems truly to separate the soul from the body. Nevertheless, the person does not die, but he does not know during some instants, whether the soul animates the body or not. She seems to be entirely in another region, completely different from this one we are in. She sees there a light so superior to ours that if she were to pass her life combining different elements to obtain it, she would never succeed.

In those raptures the soul obtains the knowledge of three things, which she possesses in a very high degree. The first is the knowledge of God, which in the measure that He reveals

Himself imparts a very perfect idea of His greatness. The second, the knowledge of herself, and a profound sentiment of humility at the thought that a creature who, in comparison with the Author of so many marvels is mere vileness, has dared to offend Him, and is still so bold as to look upon Him. The third, a sovereign contempt for all earthly things outside of those that can be useful in the service of God.

Nevertheless, however sublime this prayer may be, and however intimate the soul with God in these mystic raptures, she ought always to continue to occupy herself with meditation on the mysteries of the life of Christ. "We have need to think of the saints. With greater reason we must not deliberately separate ourselves from the most sacred Humanity of Jesus Christ, who is the source of all goodness and a remedy for all evil. Has not this adorable Saviour said that He is the way and the truth and the life, and that no one can go to His Father except through Him, and that he who see Him, sees also the Father?"

II

The eighth degree of prayer brings about

the *transforming union* of the soul with God, or the *spiritual marriage.*

"When the Lord deigns to grant a soul the signal favor of this divine marriage, He causes her to enter into that apartment which is not in the superior part of the soul, as the others, but in her inmost center. He does not unite Himself to her in the same fashion as in rapture. The soul was then blind and deaf, as was St. Paul on the day of his conversion. . . . Now, God in His goodness wishes to remove the scales from her eyes, so that she may see and hear something of what is given her, although in a strange fashion.

"Sometimes from the midst of a resplendent cloud which envelops the mind, the most holy Trinity appears to the soul of one thus privileged. In virtue of an admirable revelation she comprehends that these Three Persons are only one substance, one sole power, one sole being, one sole God, in such sort that what we hold by faith, the soul comprehends so to speak from sight.

"The three Divine Persons then communicate themselves to her, speak to her, and make her comprehend those words of the Gospel, that Jesus will come to her together with the

Father and the Holy Ghost, to dwell in the soul that loves Him and keeps His commandments."

The simple union can be compared to two tapers brought so closely together that they give forth only one light, but which can be separated the one from the other. I will say again, that it is as the flame, the wick and the wax which form only one sole light, but which can also be divided and subsist separately.

"The union of the spiritual marriage is a most intimate one. It is as the water which, falling from Heaven into a river or fountain, becomes so mixed with the other water that we can no longer separate or distinguish the water of the earth and the water from heaven. Or again, as a small stream that enters into the sea and loses its identity. Or, lastly, as the light that enters into an apartment by two windows and the rays of which, divided at first, reunite in the interior into one sole light. Perhaps by those words, 'He who is united to God is one spirit with Him,' St. Paul intended to speak of this admirable marriage, which presupposes that the soul has already received the favor of union.

"Finally, after the spiritual espousals more

than once God and the soul separate. The same happens after the union. In the spiritual marriage, on the contrary, the soul always remains with God in the above named center."

Thus the three elements essential to spiritual marriage are: (1) a sublime contemplation of God, (2) a transformation and divine union of the soul with God, (3) the permanent union, which is equivalent to confirmation in grace.

After having contracted this divine marriage, the soul no longer feels the impetuous raptures of the espousals. The ecstasies and flights of the spirit become more rare. At last, in place of desiring death in order to enjoy the sight of God, the soul becomes more apostolic. "We must not imagine that the design of God is solely to give them [souls] consolations and delights; this would be a great error, for the most signal favor that He can bestow on us in this world is to render our life like to that which His Son led upon earth. Do you know what is the 'meat' of predilection that we can give to our Master? It is, that our zeal by all the means it can invent bring back to Him souls in order that they may be saved and sing His praises forever."

All the degrees of prayer, from the simple

vocal prayer to the mystic union of the spiritual marriage, consequently tend to the apostolic life as towards an end, a summit where it blossoms, radiates, draws the attention of souls, gains them for the cause of Christ, and contributes to their salvation.

NINETEENTH CONFERENCE

Every fervent soul may entertain the aspiration of tending to the perfection of the mystic life

I

1. In our past conferences we considered in some detail the important questions pertaining to the interior and the mystic life. Among others we studied the means to be adopted in order to attain to the perfection of that life. The time seems now opportune to face the great practical question whether it is permitted to every fervent soul to entertain the desire and aspiration of tending to the perfection of the mystic life by an unceasing and intimate union with God in contemplation.

Before answering this question, let me first of all recall to your memory what I said in a former conference concerning the mystic life. I said that by the mystic life we do not mean simply a Christian life more or less fervent;

neither do we mean an extraordinary Christion life, favored with ecstasies, visions, or prophetic revelations. We consider the mystic life in the ordinary sense as the normal crowning of the spiritual life by the Gifts of the Holy Ghost.

Now, according to the principles we have already established (see Vol. I, page 42–45), the reply must be given in the affirmative. Since God, on the one hand, offers those signal favors to all souls, and since, on the other, by corresponding faithfully to all graces, all can merit, at least in a larger sense, such benefits, it follows that each one can entertain the hope of arriving at this happy term if he employs all the means that lead to it.

The normal development that we have explained proves that there is no interruption, no solution of continuity in this divine chain of prayer. It may be laid down as a rule, therefore, that the soul, from the time she commences by a sincere and faithful application of herself to the exercise of prayer, is called to ascend to the highest summits.

2. This is the clear thought of St. Teresa. In each of the mansions of the *Interior Castle* she points out some particular virtues, the

practice of which is a sort of preparation for a superior degree of prayer.

It is, at first, *resistance to temptation.* "To take the least of all," she says, "this first apartment is no less desirable and full of treasures. Provided that *one knows how to defend himself from the reptiles* (temptations, etc.) which come in with him, he shall have the happiness of passing on still farther."

Then it is the *conformity of our will to the will of God.* "Be assured that in this consists the most sublime perfection to which one can raise himself in the spiritual way. The more one practises this conformity, the more he receives from God, and the more progress he makes also in this way."

In the third apartment, the saint recommends the *practice of the Christian virtues, of prayer, etc.* . . . She concludes: "This state is without doubt most desirable. It prepares, it seems, for the last apartment. And truly, if they desire it, our Lord will open to them the entrance to it: for with the excellent disposition they are in, there are no favors that they cannot expect from Him."

Up to the fourth *mansions* she insists on *humility.* "Humility, humility, since it is by it

that the Lord allows Himself to be conquered and yields to all our desires, . . . leaving it to Him to dispose of us according to His will and to conduct us wherever it pleases Him. Let a soul be *humble and detached* from all, but in truth, and not in imagination, which so often deceives; and the Divine Master, I have no doubt, will grant her not only this grace (of quietude), but many others which surpass her desires."

She returns to renunciation, still more complete and perfect, and then, speaking of the prayer of union, she says: "One can very well arrive at a true union with the aid of our Lord, if one labors to acquire it *by renouncing one's own will,* and attaching oneself solely to the will of God." She affirms further that *charity* contributes to prepare this signal favor: "May the Divine Master grant that this charity may never be extinguished among us! *Doubt not, if you preserve it perfectly, you will obtain the union of which I have spoken.*"

In the sixth mansions, where there is question of the ecstatic union, she speaks in the same fashion: "These are favors our Lord gives to whom He wills; if we love Him as He has loved us, He will grant us all things,

for He desires nothing so much as to find a soul to whom He may give Himself, and His gifts diminish not His riches." The sincere love of God can conduce to the ecstatic union.

Finally, arrived at the summit of the mystic life, at the transforming union which has place in the mystic marriage and the favors that accompany it, St. Teresa teaches once again the same doctrine: "Provided that the soul be faithful to God, never, to my mind, will God fail to give her this intimate and manifest sight of His presence. She hopes firmly that God will not permit her to lose through her own fault so signal a favor; and she has reason to hope so. . . . It is certain *that when we remove from our soul all affection for creatures and detach ourselves from them for the love of God, this great God will immediately fill the soul with Himself.*"

A soul, then, that is perfectly faithful to grace, will infallibly arrive at the summit of perfection and enjoy the signal favor of the most sublime mystic union.

II

1. Unhappily a very small number of souls have such a fidelity. For there is not question

solely of faults fully voluntary, but of all the imperfections that compromise correspondence to grace, to the call of God, to His special affection. These failings withhold the divine action and deprive the soul of supernatural favors.

Now among the legions of souls who do not respond with an absolute promptitude and an inviolable fidelity to the attractions of grace, some may nevertheless be favored with new graces, which will conduct them, in spite of their negligence, to the summit of perfection. But these are extraordinary cases that depart from the normal economy of the supernatural. St. Teresa makes allusion to them: "It is then on a just title that you desire to learn how one arrives at a like honor. I will tell you what I know. *Speaking, nevertheless, of the ordinary conduct of God, and leaving aside extraordinary cases where He grants this singular grace because He wills it.* These words manifestly indicate that those extraordinary cases . . . do not enter into this unique way of perfection by following the regular order and the habitual progression to which all souls are invited, at least in a remote fashion. Others, on the contrary, have never entered on this route.

They have not even dreamed of it, or if they entered upon it, they have idled on the way. But it is always solely through their own fault. This does not mean, though, that they could not arrive at a certain perfection, but it will be far removed from that of faithful or specially favored souls."

In *The Way of Perfection* St. Teresa wrote: "It is of great importance, I repeat it, to remember that God does not conduct all men by the same way. . . . Thus, though all the religious of this monastery would apply themselves to prayer, it would not follow that they would all be contemplatives. This is impossible." But in a later chapter the Saint adds: "Consider that our Lord invites us all. This is the truth itself. We cannot doubt it. If this banquet were not general, He would not have called us all to it; and after He had called us to it, He would not say: 'I will give you to drink'; He would have said: 'Come ye all; you will lose nothing in serving me; as to this celestial water, I will give it to whom I please'; but, as He put no restriction either in His call or in His promise, *I hold for certain that all those who delay not on the route will at last drink of this living water.*"

2. St. Teresa perceived that there is an apparent opposition between those two teachings. This is why, in speaking of the two ways, she explains that she wished to console those of her sisters who, not having been faithful to all graces, should aspire to a less high perfection, unless the Lord judged it fit to pass over their infidelities and conduct them to the joys of contemplation. "It seems that there is a contradiction between this last chapter and what I said before when, to console the souls *who do not arrive at contemplation,* I advanced that there are many ways to go to God. . . . I maintain it still; our Lord knowing our weakness, and taking counsel with His bounty, has procured for us succor according to our wants. Nevertheless He has not said to some to go by one way, and to others to go by another; but in the excess of His mercy He has permitted all to drink at this divine fountain."

Insisting still on this point of view, the Saint concludes: "Let us, from the commencement of prayer, have this absolute confidence that our efforts will be crowned with success, and however small our part of the booty may be, we shall always be very rich.

"Fear not that the Lord, who invites you

to drink of this water, will allow you to die of thirst. I have said this already, but I cannot too often recall it to your memory, so much do I desire to strengthen you against the discouragement into which fall so many souls to whom the goodness of God is as yet revealed only by faith, and not by an experimental knowledge."

The principle always remains the same. We repeat it in those simple words of the Saint which we have already cited: "This state is certainly worthy of desire. It prepares us, it seems, for the last mansions, and truly, if souls desire it, our Lord will open the door to them."

3. Why then do so small a number of Christians arrive at those heights of contemplation? It is without any doubt because the number of Christians who disengage themselves from all self-seeking to practise charity generously towards the neighbor, and give themselves entirely to the love of God, is so very small.

It suffices to read the "Sermon on the Mount" to be convinced that it is truly the exception among Christians to live the beautiful life of perfection which the Saviour described to His disciples. Alas, yes, they are rare who

have understood and live up perfectly to the precepts of total abnegation of self: "If anyone will come after me, let him deny himself," and of the love of God above all things: "Thou shalt love the Lord, thy God, with thy whole heart, and with thy whole soul, and with all thy mind." If the number of Christians who practise these two precepts faithfully were more considerable, in the same proportion would be increased that of Christians who should rise to the heights of contemplation. This is the thought of St. Teresa: "Would to the Divine Master that charity may never become extinct among us! If you keep it perfect, you will obtain, doubt it not, the union of which I speak. "It is certain that when we remove from our soul all affection for creatures, and detach ourselves from them for the love of God, this great God will immediately fill the soul with Himself. These are favors that our Lord gives to whom He wills; if we love Him as He has loved us, He will grant them to us all."

This conclusion makes us comprehend why all the saints here below arrived at the mystic union, *and that there can be no perfect sanctity without it.* It makes us comprehend

further, what was the subject of our enquiry, that *it is permitted to every fervent soul to entertain the desire of aspiring to the perfection of the mystic life by an unceasing and intimate union with God in contemplation.*

TWENTIETH CONFERENCE

Frequent Confession, a Means of Uniting us With God

I

In the first chapter of the First Epistle of St. John we read the following words: "If we confess our sins, He [God] is faithful and just, to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all iniquity." (1 John I, 9.)

1. In this remarkable passage the Apostle refers to the healing and sanctifying effects produced on the soul by the reception of the Sacrament of Penance.

It is of the frequent reception of this Sacrament that I wish to speak to you to-day. This practice is recommended to all who purpose to lead an exemplary and penitential life. This we learn from the legislation of the Church in the present as well as in past ages. The new Code of Canon Law prescribes weekly confession for all religious (can. 595, 3°) and commands all clerics to have recourse to it fre-

quently (can. 125, 1°). The motives that inspire the conduct of the Church in regard to its ministers preserve all their strength when there is question of the faithful in general, and more particularly of pious persons who desire to lead a life conformable to the ideal of perfection which is proper to the religious and ecclesiastical states.

Without doubt the Code appears to suppose for the mass of the pious faithful a recourse less regular to the Sacrament of Penance; but this latitude is evidently suggested by the desire to facilitate the reception of Holy Communion for all. The faithful as a rule have not the facility that religious and priests enjoy of addressing themselves to a confessor of their choice. This difficulty, increased by the want of time necessary to go to church and wait as long as circumstances demand to make their accusation, would keep back many timorous souls who would not dare to present themselves at the holy table without going to confession. In that case, not having any grave fault to reproach themselves with, they can tranquillize their conscience by a simple act of contrition.

But where these inconveniences do not exist,

or are considerably reduced, there is no longer any motive for not responding to the desire of the Church. Pius VI qualified as "rash, pernicious, contrary to the practice of pious souls approved by the Council of Trent" the proposition of the Jansenist Synod of Pistoia that the faithful should abstain from frequent confession lest they feel contempt for it.

This means of perfection was held in great honor in the monasteries of the Middle Ages and became the universal practice of souls desirous to advance on the way of perfection. This usage is confirmed by the example of the greatest saints, some of whom went to confession every day.

2. And now let us consider what are the principal advantages of frequent confession.

These advantages flow from the Sacrament itself, from the dispositions of the penitent, from the directions given by the confessor.

a) St. Thomas teaches that all the Sacraments give some remedy for sin because they confer grace. Every absolution received under due conditions becomes then for the fervent soul a source of divine benefits, from which it can legitimately profit.

"In the Sacrament of Penance," says Father

Scaramelli, S.J., "the soul whole and entire is bathed in the Blood of Christ, whose infinite virtue can not only wash out of it stains and deformities, but, moreover, make it purer than the lily, whiter than the snow."

b) A good confession is an excellent means of rendering the soul more prudent and attentive to avoid the faults that it commits habitually. And this it is because in the first place, the retractation of faults committed and the good purpose and resolution of amendment which accompany confession remove the soul from affection for sin, and render her more vigilant against falling back into it.

Again, because the will finds an increase of strength in the grace of the Sacrament, it can more strongly resist the perverse inclinations of nature. Lastly, because the confessor, made aware of the faults of his penitent, tries to deliver him from them by pointing out to him the means and helps that can bring about his amendment.

c) All souls, however perfect they may be, have need of being conducted in the difficult ways of the spiritual life. Now the greater part of them have no occasion to receive the benefits of direction outside of the confessional. This

is why, even when they may not have grave faults to accuse themselves of, it is good for them to present themselves at the tribunal of penance, not only to receive absolution of their light faults, but also to make known their bad inclinations and the dangers to which they are exposed; then, to solicit the necessary counsels, in order the better to resist temptations and to profit more abundantly by all the graces of God.

II

1. Here perhaps it is well to speak of the dangers to which frequent confession is exposed. Persons who go to confession very often are exposed to precipitation, to routine, and because of that, to danger of not bringing to their confessions sufficient contrition or a sufficiently firm purpose of amendment. "We find all too frequently," says a recent writer, "those confessions composed of some formulas recited at the pace of a steam engine, and followed by a stereotyped list of sins, always the same, which the confessor could recite to himself in advance at perceiving such or such a person behind the grill; and if one didn't know the evident good will of those who present

themselves thus at the holy tribunal, one would be tempted to doubt the value of their contrition, and therefore, of absolution."

2. Let us see, therefore, what are the conditions required so that frequent confession may escape the inconveniences to which it is exposed, and that the soul may profit by the advantages it is destined to produce. In order that frequent confession be truly fruitful, it must be made with great honesty, accompanied by a sincere contrition and a firm purpose of amendment, by humility and simplicity.

Without doubt the confession of venial faults, of which there is question here, does not demand the absolute integrity which the accusation of grave sins requires. But it demands the avowal of all the infidelities which seriously impede perfection. St. Augustine, speaking of confession, expresses himself thus: "How can a physician cure a wound that the sick person does not wish to make known to him?" And how can the confessor, who is the physician of your soul, correct your faults, if you do not make them known to him? How will he deliver you from the tyranny of your affections, which, although weak, rule over you, if you hide them

from him? How will he protect you against the temptations of the devil, who stops you, pushes you, and presses you to make you fall, if you do not denounce him with his artifices?

But though integrity is not strictly necessary in the accusation of light faults, *contrition is absolutely required,* at least for one venial sin which the penitent submits to the priest for absolution.

"God has never pardoned, and by an inviolable decree He has resolved never to pardon, those who do not conceive a sincere and supernatural sorrow for their sins," St. Gregory tells us. "The sign of a true confession does not consist in words, but in the affliction of penance. We recognize a sinner to be truly converted when, by an austerity proportioned to his grief, he endeavors to expiate the sins he confesses; the desire of perfection is seen in a soul, not by the number of faults she confesses, but by the sincere repentance she shows for the least faults committed with full deliberation.

3. Once again, in order that the soul be purified from her least imperfections, as she has the intention of being by frequent confes-

sion, it is required that her sorrow be united to a firm resolution of committing them no more in the future. Without doubt she can foresee that, by reason of the frailty from which souls the most pure are not exempt, she may fall again. She will feel, so to speak, a fear founded on past experiences, so that she will probably have to confess the same infidelities again and again. The important thing is that at the moment she accuses herself she is firmly resolved to avoid these faults and to take the means to correct herself.

4. Lastly, the pious soul that ardently desires to find in frequent confession an efficacious help for her spiritual advancement, ought to present herself at the tribunal of penance with sentiments of the most profound humility, and with a great simplicity. "Lord," says the Prophet, "a contrite and humble heart Thou wilt not despise." "Confession," says St. Thomas, "ends in humiliation; it ought then to be humble, so that one acknowledges himself weak and miserable. In order that those sentiments of humility be truly sincere and profound, the pious soul that habitually avoids every grave fault, ought to consider her sins much less in themselves than in their relation

to the infinite majesty of God and the signal favors with which she has been loaded.

However light an offense may be, or appear to be to human regards, it carries no less hurt to the exterior glory of God, which ought to be so dear to a fervent Christian. Certain faults may not indicate a particular malice on the part of those who are not favored with special graces, but they manifest an inconceivable ingratitude in privileged souls who receive an abundance of divine benefits. Hence we comprehend those accents of confusion, so perfectly sincere, which the saints have uttered in the presence of the least failings of which they felt themselves guilty in the service of God.

However, this humility ought in no wise to be affected. It ought, on the contrary, to be shown forth with a simplicity full of confidence, equally distant from exaggeration and dissimulation. The pious soul should endeavor to be always true. To this end she must apply herself to reveal her faults, such as she sees them under the eye of God, without preoccupying herself in the least with the impression they may make on the mind of the confessor, without thinking of the reprimands they may elicit.

Under these conditions frequent confession becomes very fruitful. It is a source of supernatural benefits. It powerfully aids the generous soul to advance on the way of perfection with security and a most perfect tranquillity.

TWENTY-FIRST CONFERENCE

Holy Communion, the Most Efficacious Means of our Sanctification

I

1. Among the means given us for effecting the work of perfection in our souls, the greatest and most efficacious undoubtedly is the frequent reception of the most holy Sacrament of the Eucharist. It is the one specially commended to us by our Lord Himself. "I am," He says, "the bread of life"; and again; "He that eateth my flesh and drinketh my blood, abideth in me and I in him." "I will raise him up on the last day." "If any man eat of this bread, he shall live forever, and the bread that I will give is my own Flesh for the life of the world."

St. Thomas teaches that if Baptism is the gate to the Sacraments and the beginning of the spiritual life, the Holy Eucharist is the crowning of the Sacraments and the consummation of that life. The sanctity which the

other Sacraments produce in souls is only a preparation for the reception of the Eucharist, which is destined to perfect their sanctification.

The essence of perfection consists in this that we become intimately united to God, our last End. Now, by Holy Communion the soul is united most particularly to Christ, living and suffering, to produce this new life of grace, which is a participation in the divine nature itself. This is why our Lord said to His disciples: "He that eateth my flesh and drinketh my blood, abideth in me, and I in him." Hence the more frequently a fervent soul receives Holy Communion, the more easy it is for her to live for and in God by a perfect union, which tends to transform her more and more into God Himself.

2. Now, there is this difference between the material food that we partake of and this celestial Food,—that in eating the fruits of the earth we change them into our own substance; whereas this heavenly Food changes us into the divine substance and kindles the fire of celestial love in our hearts. This doctrine is taken entirely from St. Augustine, who makes Jesus Christ speak thus: "I am the food of great

souls; grow, and you shall eat me. It is not you who will change me into the substance of your flesh, but you will be changed into me."

St. Thomas, comparing the effects of the Holy Eucharist with the effects of material food, distinguishes the following results, which follow one another in a perfect progression: Holy Communion (1) sustains the life of the soul so that it may not perish; (2) preserves it from contrary influences which could hurt its development; (3) procures for it new supernatural elements which assure it progress and full expansion; lastly, it diffuses a sweetness and a joy which are extremely agreeable to it. This Sacrament, I say, sustains the life of the soul. Indeed our Lord has wished that it be received as the spiritual food of souls by means of which are nourished and strengthened those who live the same life as He; "He that eateth me, the same also shall live by me." It removes from the pious soul the influence of the passions and of the devil, that is, the greatest hindrances to the spiritual life. When Jesus Christ is in us, He appeases the violent law of our members. He strengthens our piety and calms the troubled soul. Furthermore, when the devil sees us united so as to form only one

body with Christ, he trembles, takes to flight, and ceases to vex us by his suggestions.

Once again, this intimate union with the source of grace enables us to obtain all the necessary helps for our sanctification:—lights more clear for the understanding of the things of God; forces more energetic for the will; the resolution of unceasing progress in the ways of virtue; generous efforts to follow with a purer love the supernatural instincts of the Spirit of God.

Lastly, Holy Communion fills the soul with spiritual delights. The Bread of angels, the source of true goodness, by an admirable virtue satisfies the taste of all those who receive it worthily and with devotion. It satisfies better than did the manna of the desert, surpasses the taste of all the pleasures of the senses, and exceeds in sweetness all the delights of the spirit.

II

1. But in order that a pious soul may profit by frequent Communion, she must receive our Lord with special dispositions. These dispositions are: a great purity of conscience, a lively faith, a profound respect, an ardent desire of

perfection, inspired by a very affectionate confidence in the will and the power of the Divine Host who comes to visit her.

a) First, a great purity of conscience. A soul careful of her spiritual progress cannot content herself with being simply in the state of grace and having no mortal sin to reproach herself with. This disposition is required of all who wish to communicate worthily. A fervent soul ought to have a noble ambition—that of communicating *holily*. To this end she must assure herself that she is not only not conscious of any grave fault, but that she has purified herself from every stain by a sincere repentance and an ardent love. Moreover, she must disengage herself from all attachment to created things which might paralyze her efforts towards God, and prevent the divine union that she desires and proposes to herself to realize by frequent or even daily Communion.

b) To this end a very lively faith is indispensable. The Sacred Host that she comes to receive contains in a mysterious manner, but very really, the same Saviour who during His mortal life visited the cities and hamlets of Judea, multiplied miracles, and captivated the

crowds who followed Him. It is He who is about to take possession of this spiritual temple that He has prepared for Himself, and where He comes alike to speak, to counsel, to encourage, to cure, and perhaps to confer in profusion benefits and needed miracles. This conviction ought to be so firm in the fervent soul that no consideration can shake it. The soul, thus laid hold of, is entirely absorbed in the thought of the great event that is taking place within her, and she abandons herself to her sovereign Benefactor as if she contemplated Him directly, as if it were given her to see Him as He is in Himself.

Now faith cannot attain this degree of perfection except on condition that the soul be whole-hearted in this act, without allowing herself to be in the least distracted by thoughts alien to God, whom she is about to receive or whom she already possesses.

c) What respectful and inflamed accents of love ought not express the true sentiments of this soul, all lost in God in the most profound annihilation at her misery, but with the most lively conviction of the infinite goodness and mercy of God?

"My God! I am not worthy that Thou

shouldst come to me; but only say the word and my soul shall be healed." "My God, Thou who knowest all things, Thou knowest that I love Thee." "My Jesus, meek and humble of heart, make my heart like to Thine."

d) Our Lord makes Himself felt by the soul that gives herself up entirely to Him. He inspires her with a most ardent desire of perfection. He allows her to get a glimpse of the reforms that she must bring about in order to become agreeable to Him and to profit of His favors. As a foretaste He gives her of the spiritual delights that He reserves for her on the day on which, having definitely broken with all that is not of Him, she will be resolved to live only for Him.

A fervent soul ought to respond with eagerness to the appeals, the invitations, and the attractions of this Heavenly Guest, and entirely kindled with love for Him to swear that inviolable fidelity which will be the pledge of her sanctification.

TWENTY-SECOND CONFERENCE

The Practice of the Church Relative to Frequent and Daily Communion

1. As a supplement to the preceding conference I want to point out what is the mind of the Church relative to frequent and daily Communion.

In the primitive Church all the faithful, married or single, seculars or ecclesiastics, received the heavenly nourishment every day. St. Luke says of the Christians of this epoch: "They persevered in the doctrine of the Apostles, and in the communication of the breaking of bread." He adds, "and continuing daily with one accord, and breaking bread from house to house, they took their meat with gladness and simplicity of heart, praising and living in charity with all."

By this bread and by this meat the interpreters understand the consecrated Bread of the Holy Eucharist. St. Denis the Mystic, says: "In the primitive Church all those who

assisted at the consecration of the Eucharist participated in this Sacrament by communion." This very praiseworthy custom was observed for many centuries, as we read in the lives of the Holy Fathers.

However, in time this pious usage became more rare in Christian society; so much so, that Pope Fabian was obliged to impose on all the faithful three Communion days in the year, —Easter, Pentecost, and Christmas. Matters came even to this point that the Fourth Council of the Lateran, under Innocent III (1215) found it necessary to ordain that all the faithful should approach Holy Communion at least once a year, at Easter, and that entry into the Church should be forbidden to every transgressor of this precept in punishment of his infidelity. The Council of Trent renewed this decree in its thirteenth session.

But the decay of this ancient custom does not prove in any way that the daily reception of this sacred nourishment is less praiseworthy or commendable than formerly.

Nevertheless, many, even pious, persons think they ought to abstain from daily Communion out of respect for the Holy Eucharist, or because of their too numerous infidelities

to grace. This false conception, which may be excused on account of good faith, can no longer be admitted after the declarations of Popes Leo XIII and Pius X.

In his Encyclical of 1902 on the Eucharist, Leo XIII expresses himself thus: "We must above all labor to revive the frequent reception of the Eucharist, and abolish once and for all the contrary prejudices, the vain fears, and the specious pretexts for abstaining from it." And Pope Pius X exhorts all, even children of eight and seven years of age, to receive Holy Communion daily.

2. A question of the utmost gravity remains; namely, that concerning the dispositions requisite for the frequent and even daily reception of Holy Communion.

To resolve this question definitely Pius X, by a decree of the 20th of December, 1905, renewing the exhortations of his Predecessor, laid down as the two sole conditions requisite for daily Communion: the state of grace and a right intention. To be in the state of grace does not mean, never to fall into mortal sins; but to have obtained pardon of them before receiving Communion. The right intention consists in approaching the Holy Table not from

habit, or through vanity, or from human motives; but to satisfy the will of God, to unite ourselves more intimately to him by charity, and with the help of this divine remedy to combat our faults and infirmities.

3. Here let me say a word concerning the use pious persons ought to make of Spiritual Communion.

Spiritual Communion consists in an ardent desire of receiving the Holy Eucharist. Often pious persons are deprived of the grace of daily Communion by their occupations or the state of their health. It is not fitting that they hold themselves aloof from our Lord, whose presence and remembrance are so efficacious for spiritual progress. In this event our good God comes to their aid through the resource of Spiritual Communion. Now, although Spiritual Communion does not absolutely supply Sacramental Communion, it can become so fervent that it may be the source of precious and abundant graces.

We read in the life of St. Catherine of Siena that she so ardently desired to unite herself with her Spouse hidden under the veils of the Sacrament, that the vehemence of her desire caused her to feel sweet spiritual faintings and

she prayed Blessed Raymond, her confessor, to bring her the Bread of Angels at early dawn, in order to appease more speedily the violent spiritual hunger that tormented her.

And in the case of the beautiful soul, Blessed Imelda, the patroness of First Communicants, our Lord, to satisfy the cravings of her heart, worked an astounding miracle; for, when she was debarred from Sacramental Communion by reason of her age, while her religious sisters were participating in the mystery the Sacred Host disengaged Itself from the hand of the ministering priest and hovered before her face till seeing the miracle he ministered to her, and with such joy and ardor did she receive It that our Lord invited her to perform her thanksgiving in Heaven.

Spiritual Communion can be repeated often, even a hundred times a day, with great advantage to the soul.

But we ought to make it at least once a day with peace, recollection, and after due preparation, so that it may excite in us greater piety, that it may procure a greater advancement in virtue, and that it may supply in some sort the effects of the holy Mystery. For this end there is no moment more opportune than that

of Holy Mass, when we assist at it. For each one can then unite himself to the priest and receive in spirit this divine nourishment, as the priest receives it in reality.

TWENTY-THIRD CONFERENCE

Devotion to the Blessed Virgin

I

1. In addition to the practices of frequent confession and Communion as means particularly necessary to souls who aspire to perfection here is a third means which must on no account be omitted, and that is, devotion to the Blessed Virgin Mary. Not to speak of the necessity of this practice by reason of Mary's relations to our Divine Lord and to us, her children, this devotion is required for two practical reasons: because these souls are more exposed than others to the attacks of the devil, and because they have to undergo hard trials from spiritual dryness. We have seen that God permits the spirit of darkness to tempt them against the theological virtues, and those of humility, patience, meekness, charity, obedience, etc.

Now one of the most efficacious means of victoriously resisting these temptations is recourse to the Blessed Virgin, who is always

disposed to come to their aid. "O all you," says St. Bernard, "who perceive yourselves tossed on the turbid ocean of this world amid storms and tempests, turn not your eyes away from the shining of this star, if you would not be overwhelmed by the awful billows. If the winds of temptation arise, if you encounter the rocks of tribulation, turn to this star; call upon Mary. If you are cast upon the waves of pride, of envy, of ambition, look to the star; call upon Mary. If you are troubled at the greatness of your sins, confounded at the filthy state of your conscience, terrified at the horror of judgment, if you begin to fall into the gulf of sadness or into the abyss of despair; think of Mary. In dangers, in agonies, in doubts, think of Mary, call upon Mary. In following her, you will not go astray; in praying to her, you will not despair; in thinking of her, you will not be deceived; in attaching yourself to her, you will not fall; under her protection you have nothing to fear; under her guidance you will not be fatigued; under her flag you will arrive at port."

2. In the *dark night of the soul,* in the midst of spiritual aridities, when God for a time withdraws all sensible grace from the soul, it

is again to the holy Virgin that we must have recourse. During this hard trial the soul feels herself so to speak separated from the Creator. She is sad, tepid, lazy, without faith, hope, and love. She sees herself so miserable that she dares no longer offer anything to God, even her holiest actions. Confusion keeps her far from God with a heart full of agony and despair.

"Ah," cries out St. Bernard, "you fear to approach the Father. He gives you Jesus for Mediator. What will not such a Son obtain from such a Father? But perhaps you fear in Jesus the Divine Majesty, because in becoming man, He remained God? Have recourse to Mary, for in her is pure humanity. Without any doubt the Son will hear His Mother, and the Father, His Son."

3. A third reason why we should cultivate a particular devotion to Mary is because she is the most perfect model of the friendship that should reign between her Divine Son and the fervent soul. She was the first to experience the sweetness of the conversation of Jesus. While it is impossible to enter into the details of those intimate conversations that took place during long years between Son and Mother, it is easy to fix the subjects of them. It is sufficient to

know the dominant ideas, the dispositions, the noble ambitions of those who live together to trace with precision the principal outlines of their confidences. The outpourings of those two pure souls, having a common mission so noble to fulfill, bore upon the divine greatness and munificence, on the mission with which the one and the other were charged, to bring to men infinite treasures; on the discreet revelations that the Son made to His Mother to permit her to foresee His Apostolate, His Passion, His Resurrection; on the reflections of the Mother to her Son and with which each was impressed according to the case, with joy, with sadness, or with a noble satisfaction; on the struggles of the nascent Church and the triumphs of the martyrs; on the sublime development and outcome of their common work which would receive at last its sublime coronation in eternal glory.

Behold the finished model of the friendship that ought to reign between Jesus and every faithful soul, and of the habitual theme of their conversations.

The purity and sanctity of this celestial Friend ought to inspire in the fervent soul a most ardent desire to be pure and holy. The

combined mission of Jesus and Mary ought to call her attention to the rôle she is called upon to play in the world. The subjects of their pious conversations ought to form the matter of her constant meditations, where she can pass in review the most touching truths, the most sacred obligations, the remembrance of which will contribute to maintain and develop in her the most sweet and lasting friendship towards the Saviour.

This contemplation of the friendship of Jesus and Mary invites the soul to ardent prayer. If Jesus loves us, He loves His Mother still more. If we love Jesus, Mary has loved Him more tenderly still. It is to the Virgin, then, that we ought to have recourse, to solicit of her bounty a lively faith, which will permit us to appraise at its just value the friendship of Jesus, and sentiments full of an exquisite delicacy to taste the sweetness of this divine friendship. Furthermore, we should ask of her to give us her heart, so that we may be enabled to love her Son as she loved Him, to offer Him a pure love like hers, and thus to make reparation to Him for those who do not understand His divine attentions or fail to respond to them with eagerness.

4. The Blessed Virgin Mary procures for the souls who are truly devoted to her not only salvation, but also the perfection which makes them enter Heaven crowned with glory and laden with an abundance of merits.

This she does, provided that they wish to labor seriously for perfection and to become familiar with all the means of acquiring it. There is this difference between saving one's soul and arriving at perfection, that in order to be saved it is sufficient to live in grace and persevere to the end; whilst Christian perfection demands a continual increase of grace, and a perpetual growth of all the virtues, above all of charity.

This amiable Queen certainly procures the spiritual advancement of those who are devoted to her and who live in the grace of God; for whether she looks upon her beloved Son, or whether she turns her regards towards just souls, she feels herself strongly incited to render them more perfect. When she contemplates her dear and only Son, the fervent love that she has for Him makes her desire ardently to see Him served and honored, especially by the good, who are better disposed than others to

render Him the duties and honors that are due to Him.

On the other hand, when she casts her eyes on those souls that Her divine Son has willed to adopt as His spouses and cherished children, she desires with all the tenderness of her heart to see them advance in perfection. If, then, we can say that the eyes of Mary are merciful towards all, we must add that they are filled with a greater charity towards those who serve her and that she will obtain for them a great abundance of virtues and merits in this life, so as to procure for them an immense glory in Heaven. This is what she herself revealed to St. Gertrude. This servant of God, while in Church when the *Salve Regina* was chanted, heard at the words: *"Illos tuos misericordes oculos* (turn thine eyes of mercy towards us)" the holy Virgin say to her: "These are my most merciful looks that I am wont to turn towards those who call upon me, that I may thus load them with abundant fruits of eternal life."

II

And now let us see how particularly fervent souls ought to show their devotion to the

Blessed Virgin, as taught by the great spiritual writer, Father Scaramelli, S.J.

a) "Among the positive duties by which a fervent soul can manifest her devotion to the Blessed Mother, I place in the first rank the act by which we choose her for our Mother. In order that we may fulfill this duty well, we ought to prepare ourselves by a novena on the occasion of one of her feasts, and renew the act often with a filial affection.

"St. Philip Neri never called her by any other name than that of his most sweet Mother. Many saints have honored her with like expressions, wholly inspired with a tender love, because they really loved her as their Mother."

b) The second duty we can render her is the attentive and daily recitation of her Office. The religious of a convent were afflicted with considerable evils because of their having neglected this exercise of piety towards Mary, and they were delivered from these evils only after they had taken it up again with fervor, following the counsels of St. Peter Damian. This shows us how agreeable the recitation of those prayers are to the Holy Virgin.

c) The third means of honoring the Mother of God consists in reciting every day at least

a third part of the Rosary. The Blessed Virgin always accords great graces to souls who apply themselves to this devotion. I will only say one word concerning those that St. Gertrude obtained when one day, after this prayer, she saw at the foot of the cross as many beads of gold as she had pronounced words in reciting it. Jesus Christ took those beads and placed them in the hands of Mary, who offered them to her faithful servant, promising her at the same time graces equal to their number.

d) The fourth is to visit every day, or at least frequently, some one of her images, as was customary with so many of the saints and with others celebrated both for piety and learning. Many never went out without visiting a church consecrated to the Mother of God, to implore her blessing and to sanctify all their undertakings.

e) The fifth consists in preparing oneself with piety for her feast-days. St. Gertrude saw under the protection of Mary a choir entirely composed of young virgins, whom this good Mother looked upon with eyes full of love, because they were preparing with particular devotion for the feast of the Assumption. It is especially fitting to prepare oneself for those

solemnities by more vigorous fasting and mortification of the flesh.

This is what many holy personages did who had the custom of preparing themselves for these feasts by scourging and other austerities.

f) The sixth means of pleasing the Blessed Virgin consists in this, that each one use all his efforts to inspire this same piety in his friends, his relatives, his companions,—a thing that is most agreeable to Mary, as she revealed to St. Brigid by giving her this counsel: "Do this, so that your children may become also mine."

g) The seventh is, laboring for the love of Mary to rid oneself of one's habitual faults. Piety is ingenious; it knows how to reveal to each one a thousand other means of pleasing the Queen of Heaven.

SUPPLEMENT

It seems to me that devotion to the Holy Ghost and devotion to the Precious Blood are not practised by Catholics generally or even by devout souls as much as these great objects deserve. I, therefore, take the liberty of adding as a short supplement the following pieces, the more so, as they are not altogether unconnected with the subjects going before.

FIRST CONFERENCE

The Holy Ghost, our Consoler

"If souls only knew what a wondrous help, what a joy is devotion to the Holy Ghost, that worship would spread like a wild fire. I wish that all religious could realize what an immense power for advancement in spirituality is this devotion; one makes not steps, but leaps forward on the upward path. He teaches so many things that make the life of the spirit a variety of loveliness. 'The new and the old, my beloved, I have kept for thee.' "

1. These words were uttered by one of the latest and most beautiful of the spiritual souls that have been seen to spring up in the Church in our days. They are found in the spiritual notes of the Venerable Sister M. John Berchmans of the Institute of the Holy Names of Jesus and Mary, and they are only too true. What a wondrous help, what a joy is devotion to the Holy Ghost; and yet, how little do we think of this Divine Spirit, and what little de-

votion do we ordinarily exhibit towards Him! We pray to the Father every day, and rely with confidence on His bounty. We hope in the mediation of Jesus Christ for the attainment of all good. We pray to the Blessed Mother of God to make intercession for us with her Divine Son. We have our favorite saints, to whom we pray, and whom we look up to for protection. But how few of us cultivate a lively and tender devotion to the Spirit of Love, and look up to Him for assistance in our needs!

And yet the Holy Ghost is all in all to us in the spiritual life. He abides with us. He operates all supernatural effects in our souls. "He prays within us to the Father with unutterable groanings."

This gives me occasion to speak to you on the need we have of the Holy Ghost. That need is pressing for many reasons, one of which I will mention in this conference.

I say that we have all need of a comforter to console us amid the afflictions of life. It is not necessary to prove to you what a sad experience makes us all feel only too sensibly, namely, that life is full of miseries, and that there is no age or condition in the world that has not its crosses. Some are afflicted with sick-

ness, others by poverty or temporal losses, these by the desertion of their friends, those by the persecution of their enemies. To-day the unjust deprive us of our goods, to-morrow they blacken our reputation. With what bitterness are not many consumed even in their own homes, whether through the selfishness or ill-humor of their relatives, or through the pains of mind or body they must undergo to meet the wants of a family, or to fulfill the obligations of their state. Where shall we find consolation in the evils that afflict us? In vain will you seek it from men. Few are the sincere friends who care to take part in our sorrows. And even these, though they may show us exterior sympathy, are impotent to cure the wounds of our souls; and often these few by their importunate advice succeed only, as Job's comforters did, in driving the arrow deeper into our breasts.

It is only in You, then, O Holy Spirit, that we can find true consolation in our sorrow! You alone are capable of tempering the evils that afflict us. Nay, You are Yourself our only consolation, and this is why we call You Paraclete—the Consoler by excellence—who alone can bring us true relief.

2. The Holy Spirit consoles us in two ways—either by indemnifying us for the losses we have sustained, or by turning to our advantage the evils that we suffer. Has a soul come by some temporal loss? The Holy Spirit who visits her indemnifies her for the goods she has lost by giving her others of greater value. In place of the goods of fortune which she has lost, He bestows on her the goods of grace, which are of an order superior to all worldly goods. In place of the health which sickness has deprived her of, He sheds upon her a salutary unction which soothes all her pains. In place of that friend, that protector, who has abandoned her, He Himself becomes her Protector and Friend. In a word, He Himself holds the place of all, and supplies abundantly for all the losses the soul has suffered. It was thus that the Holy Ghost consoled the Apostles afflicted at the absence of their Divine Master. They had felt a sensible joy in His presence. They could not help showing their sadness when they saw themselves on the point of being separated from Him, and they felt, in fact, after this separation the most bitter sorrow. But, after the great day of Pentecost arrived and the Holy Spirit descended upon

them, they were filled with sweet consolation, and a joy and strength pervaded them greater than that which they had felt in the company even of Jesus Christ Himself.

The Holy Ghost will effect the same in you, afflicted souls, if you prepare your hearts for His reception. He will come to you in your affliction, and you shall know by the effects of His visit that it is expedient for you to be deprived of sensible consolations which you find in creatures, that you may merit those of the Holy Ghost, which surpass them by their charm and sweetness.

3. The Holy Ghost will do more. In order to give you more abundant consolation He will make you draw advantage from the evils that you suffer. In raising your thoughts above the chastisements of nature, He will make you see in those apparent evils the surest means of procuring for you eternal goods. He will say to you in the midst of your heart that "all the tribulations of this life are not worthy to be compared with the glory that shall be their recompense," and, "that which is at present momentary and light of our tribulations worketh for us, above measure, exceedingly, an eternal weight of glory." In this view you will

support not only with patience, but even with joy, all the afflictions which it shall please God to send you, and you will cry out with the Apostle that "you are filled with joy in all your tribulations."

When, therefore, dearly beloved, you feel the chastisements of life coming upon you; when you are afflicted with loss of health, or friends, or temporal goods; when the unjust persecute or slander you; or, when you feel your heart wrung with grief or aridity: be not like the unwise, who lose heart, and give themselves up to paroxysms of despair; or, worse still, seek solace in the unlawful gratification of their appetites.

Put not your trust in the reliefs to be obtained from men, for they are unable to bring you real relief, often indeed they offer you words of sympathy which in their hearts they do not feel. Turn, on the contrary, your heart to God. Submit yourselves humbly to the dispositions of His holy will, and accept the trials He sends you as a salutary atonement for your sins.

If you do so, you may be assured that the comforter, the Holy Ghost Himself, will come upon you; will temper your griefs by giving

you a serene peace; will teach you that earthly chastisements have for their purpose to detach your hearts from worldly things, so that they may adhere to God alone; will pour out on you a sweet unction of grace, which will be for you a pledge and a foretaste of the joys of Heaven.

SECOND CONFERENCE

The Holy Ghost Our Teacher

"When He, the spirit of truth shall come, He will teach you all truth."—(John xvi, 13.)

1. When our Divine Lord promised the Apostles that He would send the Holy Ghost upon them, it was not merely with the object of consoling them in the grief of His departure from amongst them. He saw the many deficiencies of nature which it was necessary to rectify in them before sending them on the perilous mission of evangelizing the world.

One of the great requirements to the effecting of this was enlightenment of mind and a plenitude of knowledge of those divine truths which they were to impart to others. The Apostles themselves were only too sensible of their deficiency in mental equipment to act as teachers of mankind. They felt that they were only poor, ignorant rustics, who got but a smattering of education in the schools of Jewry, or in the synagogues of their native

cities. They felt, moreover, that they were dull and slow of comprehension, and that many of the things taught them by the Divine Master were but as riddles to them. They besought Him, therefore, that He would open the sense of the Scriptures to them, and reveal to them the deep sense embedded in the instructions he was wont to impart to them.

And Jesus, seeing their sincerity of heart and their ardent desire to know and believe His heavenly doctrines; knowing, furthermore, the absolute necessity of their being fully equipped with divine knowledge in order to act as the Apostles of the Word, deigned to give them the divine promise of a heavenly teacher, saying: "I will ask the Father, and he shall give you another Paraclete that he may abide with you forever, the Spirit of truth," and: "When he, the Spirit of truth, shall come, he will teach you all truth." (John xvi, 16–17; xvi, 13.)

2. Dearly beloved, we, too, have need of the Holy Ghost, not only to console us amid the afflictions of life, but far more for our enlightenment and instruction. To bring this home to you, I need not employ elaborate proofs, as it requires only a little thought to

show how ill-equipped we are mentally to meet the difficulties that confront us in life. Indeed it may be said that the intellect of man darkened by the Fall is become the source of the greater part of the moral evils in the world. A badly disposed instrument for the acquirement of knowledge, it receives truth only imperfectly and with difficulty, and is apt to mingle error with truth. And as the intellect is the primary source of our actions as men, this being vitiated, it is no wonder that thence proceed many evils. Hence, prejudice against virtue. Hence, obstinacy in vice. Hence, those multitudinous systems of error that poison the world. What form of religious worship is too absurd for fallen man to embrace, when the very principles of religious truth are perverted by false reasoning and are set aside for the corrupt maxims of paganism?

3. But, not to speak of the errors in religious belief amongst those outside the Church, what ignorance amongst the mass of Catholics with regard to religious belief and practice? It has often been a subject of surprise to me to meet with so little enlightened Catholic thought even among those who pass for educated Catholics. Well informed on indifferent matters, they

show very little knowledge in those things which they ought of all things to know, and to know well. As to the general body of Catholics, do we not see them carried away from time to time by wild theories put forward by public men and journalists, wholly incompetent to act as their instructors? That which is fashionable for the time being, is considered lawful, even though it contradicts our good sense or is manifestly opposed to the laws of Christian morality.

Again, what ignorance in matters of Christian duty! Where shall we find a truly enlightened man or woman? External success, worldly splendor, amusements, the things that please the senses,—all these are sought after, pursued with eagerness. How few give concern to the motives that should regulate their actions and direct them to their proper end, eternal life? Ah, we have great need of this heavenly Teacher to preserve us from error in doctrine and practice, and to direct us in the way of true knowledge and virtue.

4. Even to those who sincerely desire "to hear the word of God and to keep it," how little does the external Word avail without the illuminating grace of the Holy Spirit? For

three years the Apostles listened attentively to the teaching of our Saviour, yet they remained dull and worldly. Even during the last days of His ministry among them, He is obliged to reproach them for their dullness, and slowness of heart. One He has to correct for intemperance of speech; another for vanity and ambition; all for slowness of understanding and belief. To the last, His mission on earth was a riddle to them. When ascending to the Garden of Gethsemani on the night of the Last Supper, and again on Ascension Day, they foolishly inquire whether His mission is not to restore the temporal kingdom of the Jews. To convince them of the truth of His Resurrection, He has to eat with them, to appear to them many times, to speak with them, to reproach them; one of them He has even to ask to put his fingers into the place of the nails in His hands and feet and to put his hand in the wound in His sacred side, to dissipate his unbelief.

But as soon as the Holy Spirit comes upon them and they are "endued with power from on high," they seem as new men, filled with a strange enlightenment. They preach to the Jews and to the Gentiles. They instruct the ig-

norant. They confound the wise. They speak in the learned languages of Greece and Rome. All the world is astonished at the breadth and profundity of their doctrine. "Parthians and Medes," says the *Acts of the Apostles,* "Elamites, and inhabitants of Mesopotamia, Judea, and Cappadocia; Pontus, and Asia; Phrygia and Pamphilia; Egypt, and the parts of Libya about Cyrene, and strangers of Rome; Jews, also, and proselytes, Cretes, and Arabians, we have heard them speak in our own tongues the wonderful works of God." Such surprising effects of knowledge did the coming of the Holy Ghost produce in the Apostles! It will be the same with you, if you receive in its plenitude the grace of this enlightening Spirit. He will fill your mind with knowledge, He will purify your heart, and spiritualize all the faculties of your soul.

Pray, then, dearly beloved, that the Holy Ghost may come upon you and enlighten you in those things that make for your eternal salvation. Oh! how many and various are those things—the gift of wisdom that you may see and know God as the chief and highest Good; the gift of understanding of the truths imparted by the Church, as far as they are adapt-

able to the weakness of our intellect here below; the gift of knowledge of the divine law, and the proper manner of its fulfillment; the gift of counsel, which will enable you to take the safest way that leads to salvation and to avoid the many snares and pitfalls set for your destruction. Recognize with the blind man of Jericho that your greatest need is "that you may see," and beg of the Holy Ghost that He will open your eyes to the nothingness of the things of time and the greatness of those of eternity; and the Holy Ghost, the Spirit of Truth, will come to you and enlighten your understanding, will teach you all necessary truth, and will remain with you forever.

THIRD CONFERENCE

The Holy Ghost Our Strengthener and Healer

I

1. In our former conferences we considered the Holy Ghost in two capacities,—as our Consoler and Teacher. To-day let us consider Him in two others,—as our Strengthener and Healer.

And, first, as our Strengthener.

How much are we not in need of the Holy Ghost? We are placed by God in this world in a state of trial, and it is a condition of our existence that we sustain a severe contest against many adversaries. In this spiritual warfare we have the world and its scandals to tempt us—that great, wicked world denounced by Jesus Christ, and which contradicts His teaching. We have the evil spirits to assail us and to solicit us to commit sin. "Our warfare is not with flesh and blood, but with princi-

palities and powers, the rulers of this world of darkness." And this combat with the powers of darkness commences with our entrance into life and ends only with death. And, lastly, we are obliged to carry on an unceasing conflict with our unsubdued flesh. "I find a law in my members contradicting the law of my mind."

To combat these various adversaries successfully we have need of a great fixity of purpose, together with a will habitually inclined to good. But that will fixed in its purpose for good, we find not in ourselves. On the contrary, that will of ours, which in a state of innocence would be established in good by a perfect conformity to God's will, since the Fall has become inconstant and inclined to evil. This weakness inherent in our will, joined to the strong incentives to evil coming from our powerful spiritual enemies abroad, exposes us to the greatest danger of falling into sin. Do we not see every day thousands hurried into sin and hell as the result of this unequal contest? Where shall we look for strength to sustain us? Shall we find it in the much-vaunted nostrums of philosophic speakers and writers—in the "higher culture," as they call it, the sense of self-respect, philosophic study, moral recti-

tude of the human heart? All these means have been tried and found wanting. Nay, many of them have only added to our danger by discovering to us new and more refined methods of committing sin.

2. It is only to You, then, O Strengthening Spirit, who of old sustained the hearts of the Apostles and carried them to the performance of unheard of prodigies of zeal;—it is only to You that we are to look for aid!

See how the grace of the Holy Spirit operated in them and sustained them in their unexampled labors. Before His coming they were frail men, subject to many weaknesses. One, at the Passion, grows pale at the inquiry of a servant-maid and denies upon oath that he ever knew Him. Two others, the most trusted, ambition to get the first place in the Kingdom of Heaven. The bickerings and disputes of these men betray their imperfections and evoke a mild rebuke from the Master. All, at His apprehension, timidly abandon Him and save themselves by flight. Even after the Resurrection the Apostles cower in fear of the Jews, and perform their spiritual exercises in secret and behind closed doors.

But as soon as the day of Pentecost arrives

and the grace of the Holy Ghost is poured upon them, they are as men animated with a new spirit, as men made drunk with the "new wine" of grace which energizes in their souls and carries them to acts of unheard-of heroism and zeal. From that moment their feebleness and pusillanimity have passed away, and they are as warriors that go forth "conquering and to conquer." They preach to the assembled multitudes. They boldly charge the Jews with the murder of the Saviour, and call upon them to do penance for their phenomenal crime. Neither scourges nor prison cells nor the opposition of the powerful nor the threat of death itself can stem the onrush of their impetuous zeal.

Countries and nations are too small for the exercise of their Apostolic ardor. "In every land was heard the sound of their voice, and at the ends of the earth their words." Communities and peoples are welded into one grand Christian society by the power of that grace which stirs in the hearts of the Apostles and transforms them into heroes in the cause of Jesus Christ.

Such were the effects of the strengthening grace of the Holy Ghost in the days of the

Apostles; and such they are to-day in the hearts of the well-disposed. Such will they be in you if you are thoroughly convinced of the need you have of this Strengthening Spirit, and humbly invoke His help. His grace will enable you to overcome all your spiritual enemies. And you will feel in yourself the truth of the words of the Apostle: "By the grace of God I am what I am," and "I can do all things in him that strengtheneth me."

II

1. Let us consider Him lastly as our Healer. Our souls, as you know, like our bodies are subject to many maladies. Those maladies are of a spiritual order which only the Heavenly Physician can cure. They are by consequence far more fatal and far more to be feared than those of the body; for the soul affected with sin lives in a state of death. It is incapable, by consequence, of producing an act of that supernatural life which unites us to God and renders us worthy of His rewards. Ah, how that soul is to be wept over that lives in a state of sin! A man sick in body can still desire and ask for a cure; but the poor soul dead by sin cannot of itself so much as form the wish of

being cured, or demand the remedy of the evil that besets it. "For we are not capable of ourselves of a good thought for salvation." Nor "can we pronounce the saving name of Jesus except by the motion of the Holy Ghost." It is to the Holy Ghost, then, that we are indebted for the work of our sanctification, since "it is He who pours into our hearts that supernatural charity which makes us friends of God and heirs of His kingdom."

It is true that Jesus Christ by His sufferings and death has merited for us the grace of reconciliation with His Father, that He has given us His Blood to be the remedy of our wounds. But it is the Holy Ghost that applies to us the merits of Jesus Christ by the infusion of the grace which justifies us; because this grace, being the effect of the pure love of God for men, the Holy Ghost who is the love *par excellence* of the Father and of the Son, is its source. It is He, then, that purifies us from our sins in order to unite us to God by the bonds of perfect charity.

2. All this brings home to us of how little avail are all human efforts to effect the sanctification of a soul, if they be not quickened by the life-giving grace of the Holy Ghost. We

may exert ourselves to get rid of sin or to bring about the conversion of another, but our labor effects nothing to the purpose if the Holy Spirit quicken not our action. And we may apply to ourselves the allegory of the dry bones spoken of by Ezechiel. The prophet tells us that he saw in a vision a great plain strewn with the bones of the dead, and the Lord bade him preach to the dry bones, that they might arise and come to life again. The prophet did as he was commanded, and as he spoke, behold a commotion and a noise; and the bones came together, each one to its joint, and by degrees sinews and flesh came upon them, and the skin was stretched out over them; but still there was no life in them. And the Lord spoke again, and bade him address the Spirit, and say to Him: "Thus saith the Lord: 'Come, O Spirit, from the four winds, and blow upon those slain, and let them live again.'" The prophet did once more as he was commanded. "And the Spirit came into them, and they lived again, and they stood upon their feet, an exceeding great army."

3. Dearly beloved, I may preach to you and exhaust all my powers of argument and exhortation, but in vain. The sole effect will be

a commotion and a noise, and an apparently spiritual result, without any real supernatural good. I address myself, therefore, to the Holy Ghost and pray: "Come, O Holy Spirit, fill the hearts of the faithful, and kindle in them the fire of divine love. Blow upon the imperfect ones that are among them, that they may take up again the spirit of the perfect life. Open their eyes that they may see and correct their faults. Touch their ears deaf to the preachings of the divine word. Soften their hearts that they may be made sensible to grace. For You can of the very stones raise up children to Abraham, and out of sinners fashion the greatest saints. May all receive the fullness of Your seven-fold gifts, that, renewed in mind and heart, they may begin to tread in the ways of perfection."

Would to God that my prayer may be heard, and that I may see renewed in you, dearly beloved, the marvels worked by God in the scattered bones that took, at the breath of the Spirit, a new life! If you respond to the grace of the Holy Ghost who calls you powerfully to-day, He will animate you with His breath; He will work His effects in you; He will be the soul of your soul, the principle of all your

actions; even as your soul is the principle of all the movements of your body. It is He who will think, speak, and act in you. He will impress on your actions a character of sanctity which will be for you the pledge of eternal life.

FOURTH CONFERENCE

The Precious Blood

I

What was it, Lord, that crimsoned
Life's day at break of morn;
What power dwelt in the waters
When I, Thy child, was born?

What tide is it that laves me
And takes my sins away;
What is it, Lord, that made me
Thy soldier in the fray?

"The Precious Blood I shed for thee
Upon the Hill of Calvary."

I

1. So sang the devout soul, pouring forth the ardors of her heart in accents of burning verse; and her words recall to us how much we owe to the Precious Blood "shed for us upon the hill of Calvary."

Now it is with an earnest appeal for the practice of devotion to the Precious Blood, to be shown forth in the grateful remembrances

of all it has done for us, and of all we ought to do for it in return, that I wish to bring to a close those conferences on the Interior Life, and this I do, because I know of no more worthy and sanctifying work to which we can devote our lives than that of love and veneration for this great object. To this effect, therefore, let me, first of all, lay down for you the doctrine of the devotion. What is the meaning of the devotion to the Precious Blood and what are its prescribed limits? For, there are few, comparatively, who give serious thought to the theology of this great subject, and to its defined place among the devotions of the Church; and many even of those who practise devotion to this great object have not a clear and well-defined notion of its scope and bearing.

Well, dearly beloved, by the devotion to the Precious Blood we mean, in the first place, the veneration paid to the Blood of Jesus Christ, our Saviour, the Blood that pulsated within His Sacred Heart and that vivified His Sacred Body while on earth. It is the veneration paid to the Blood that still courses through His veins in His sacramental life on our altars, and that pleads powerfully for us before the throne of mercy in Heaven. The physical entity of

the Blood of Jesus is thus the material object of the devotion.

By the devotion to the Precious Blood we mean, in the second place, the worship paid to the redeeming love of God for man, of which the Blood shed for us by Jesus Christ is the symbol; as it is the efficient cause and the purchase price of that Redemption. The Precious Blood, then, as the symbol of God's love for us and of our Redemption by Jesus Christ, is the spiritual object of this devotion. For just as in all commercial transactions where justice is accomplished there is necessarily a purchase price by which worth is given for advantage of property obtained; so, in this case, the object obtained, that is to say, our Redemption, was obtained solely as the result of our Lord's having shed His Blood on Calvary.

2. And, now, dearly beloved, as every devotion has a beginning, a development, and a history, it is good that I say some words relative to the origin and history of the devotion of the Precious Blood.

And here I am obliged to say, that unlike other devotions that have risen up in the Church in some special age or circumstances,

the devotion, or rather, I should say, the adoration of the Precious Blood existed always. Nay, the chief originators and propagators of the veneration paid to the Precious Blood may be said to be the Apostles themselves, especially Sts. Peter, John, and Paul.

But not in the Christian Church alone is the Precious Blood pointed out as one of the chief objects of our love and veneration. From the very beginning of the history of mankind the Blood of the future Redeemer was pointed out in type and figure as the instrument of the Redemption, and the chief agency by which God should sanctify the world. As proof of this we see that from the days of Abel the shedding of the blood of animals was looked on as a medium of propitiation for sin. When the Almighty was about to send His destroying angel to slay the first-born of the Egyptians, He ordered that in every Jewish house the Paschal lamb should be slain, and that the lintels and doorposts should be sprinkled with the blood. And wherever the type was seen the destroying angel passed by and left the inmates untouched; whilst lamentations and grief filled the homes of their oppressors, at the loss of their cherished first-born.

Again, in the "sacrifice for sin" the priest was directed to make those seven sprinklings of the blood of the victim towards the Holy of Holies where God dwelt, typical of the seven bloodsheddings of the Christ during His mortal life, and of the seven-fold outpouring of the redeeming Blood in the Church's Sacramental system.

Once again, in the same "sacrifice for sin," the four horns of the altar of incense were stained with the sacrificial blood, to typify the four fountains of the Blood of Christ that were to be opened by the nails in His hands and feet, on Calvary.

Once again, interpreters of Scripture discover in the outpouring of the sacrificial blood on the table and around the altar of holocausts a reminder and a type of the copious shedding of the Saviour's Blood on the altar of the Cross, where He offered Himself as a holocaust to the Father in expiation of our sins.

And when the high priest on the great day of Expiation entered beyond the veil into the Holy of Holies, it was only after copious sprinkling of the blood of victims, to testify that the portals of the Eternal Holies were closed to the entrance of mankind; nor could

they be opened, and access be obtained to the Father, except by the shedding of the Blood of the Saviour, on Calvary.

And, as St. Paul tells us, "when every commandment of the Law had been read by Moses to all the people, he took the blood of calves and goats, with water, and scarlet wool, and hyssop, and sprinkled both the book itself and all the people, saying: 'This is the blood of the testament which God hath enjoined on you'; the tabernacle also and all the vessels of the ministry in like manner he sprinkled with blood, and almost all things according to the Law are cleansed with blood; and without shedding of blood there is no remission."

To this dedication of the Law by the sprinkling of blood does our Lord allude at the Last Supper when, taking the Chalice, "He gave thanks and gave to the disciples, saying: 'Drink ye all of this; for, this is My Blood of the New Testament, which shall be shed for many unto the remission of sins.' "

And St. Paul in the Epistle to the Hebrews, alluding to the former bloodshedding on the day of Expiation, says: "Christ being come, an High Priest of the good things to come, by a

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greater and more perfect tabernacle not made with hand; that is, not of this creation; neither by the blood of goats or of calves, but by His own Blood entered once into the Holies, having obtained eternal Redemption. For, if the blood of goats and oxen and the ashes of an heifer, being sprinkled, sanctify such as are defiled to the cleansing of the flesh; how much more shall the Blood of Christ, who, by the Holy Ghost, offered Himself unspotted unto God, cleanse our conscience from dead works to serve the living God? And therefore He is the Mediator of the New Testament, by means of His death, for the Redemption of those transgressions which were under the former Testament, that they that are called may receive the promise of eternal inheritance."

II

1. And now it is good for us to examine what are the claims of the Precious Blood to our special love and veneration. Why should we pay special veneration to the Blood of Jesus Christ? I answer, every claim that could induce men to pay love and worship to any object, the Precious Blood can put forth by right inherent and acquired. First of all, it claims our

devotion because it is the Blood of our God. For, though it be a human thing, the Blood of the Man-God Jesus Christ, formed from the pure blood of the Blessed Virgin Mary, and time was when it did not exist; still by reason of the hypostatic union of the Sacred Humanity with the Person of the Son of God, the Precious Blood is divine, and, therefore, worthy of supreme religious worship.

For you must remember that when the Son of God became Man, the two natures, the human and the divine, were so united in Him that there is present but one Person, that of the Son of God. And, hence, the Humanity of Jesus Christ is the Humanity of God, and as such divine and worthy of divine honor. Therefore, as the Humanity of Jesus Christ is the Humanity of the Divine Person; so, the Body of Jesus Christ is the Body of the Man-God, and the Blood that coursed through that Body and was its life, was the Blood of God, and, therefore, worthy of supreme love and veneration.

And I would have you further believe that the Precious Blood is not a mere concomitant of the Body, or of the Sacred Humanity; that its union with the Godhead takes place, not by

reason of its being a part of that Humanity. It leans immediately on the Godhead, as does the Sacred Humanity itself, and is united to the Sacred Person by the hypostatic union, which joins the man with God.

2. Again, we should love and venerate the Precious Blood, for that it, on the one hand, is the symbol of the redeeming love of God for us, and on the other, is the price of our Redemption. And here we see what is distinctive and peculiar in this object of our veneration; in as much as it and it alone redeemed us, and is the efficient cause of our Redemption. The Sacred Humanity is divine and united to the Godhead by the hypostatic union; but not the Sacred Humanity as such is the price of our salvation. The Sacred Heart is a divine object of our worship, because it is the symbol of God's love for us, and the human organ through which the astonishing love of God for us was poured out upon us; yet, not the Sacred Heart is the efficient cause of our Redemption, but the Precious Blood, which, by its copious shedding on Calvary cleansed us from our sins. It is this singular reality, this unmated offering, this unshared privilege, in which the grandeur of the Precious Blood resides, a

grandeur which is also communicated to the devotion.

3. We should love and venerate the Precious Blood, I say, for that it is the price of our Redemption. It is the price of our Redemption! Ah, how much is contained in that short sentence. It is the price of our Redemption. It reminds us that there was a time when we were all the slaves of hell, and that coldness for, and indifference to, and hatred of, God reigned in the human heart; and, as a result of that hatred, the whole human race was doomed to perdition. An infinite outrage against God's majesty had been committed by man, and man must suffer the penalty of his crime.

By original sin the whole human race was estranged from God, and the gates of Heaven were closed against us, and to this first injury were added many personal sins, which merited for us the punishment of hell. What was to be done in order that man might be reconciled with his Creator; and that where hatred and sin abounded, grace and love might abound the more? Man himself could not do it; for he was the guilty one, and whatever services he might render to God, were due to Him already by a thousand other titles. The angels could not

make the atonement for man's sin. They were finite beings, and, consequently, finite in their action; and as between the finite and the infinite, there is no proportion, they are wholly incapable of making atonement for man's sin. Even God Himself, as God, could not right the wrong done His Sovereign Majesty. Sovereign and independent in His nature, and wholly incapable of abasing Himself as God, He could not pay the price of man's Redemption, and satisfy His Justice for the injury that had been done Him. What then, was to be done; and must the guilty one perish for his crime?

4. But when our case appears desperate, the wisdom of God will devise, and the power of God will bring about a remedy for our ills, and save us. The wisdom of God, I say, will devise, and the power of God will bring into being a Man-God. This Man-God will bear the brunt of avenging justice, and, through the infinite acceptability of His Godhead, and through the cleansing efficacy of His Precious Blood, which will be shed for man's salvation, man's injury to God will be expiated, and the guilty one will be saved.

In man's hour of desperate peril, therefore, a

voice is heard from the throne of the Godhead itself heralding relief: "Sacrifice and oblation Thou dost not desire, O God! peace-offerings, and offerings for sin, do not please thee. . . . But a Body fitted for suffering and sacrifice thou hast given me. . . . Then, said I, 'behold I am ready to do thy will, O God.' " It was the voice of the Son of God preluding the Incarnation, and offering Himself to the Father as a victim of atonement for the sins of the world. The Eternal Father accepts the offering: and, behold, when the fullness of time was come, the Divine Word assumed human nature and was made man—"a body thou has fitted to me." And while men "know not who is in the midst of them," the tiny rill of the Precious Blood is drawn from the Immaculate Mother's heart. This rill it was that fed the crimson stream which pulsated through the heart and arteries of Jesus, even till the time came when the Virgin "brought forth her first-born Son, and laid Him in a manger, because there was no room for them in the inn."

FIFTH CONFERENCE

The Bloodsheddings of the Saviour

What makes the sacred chalice
Glow like ruby fire,
And fills my heart with yearning
For Thee, its one desire?

What is it, Lord, that lightens
Life's burden and its pain;
What grace is it that sweetens
Each cross and makes it gain?

"The Precious Blood, O Child of Mine,
My Heart has shed for love of thine!"

I

1. Two things beyond all others have been the stay and solace of holy souls and the source of that abiding supernatural energy through which they became in time transformed by love —the daily meditation on the Passion of Christ, and veneration for the same Lord abiding sacramentally in the Eucharist. As it has been

said so eloquently and tersely by St. Paul: "I live in the faith of a God who loved me, and who delivered Himself to death for me."

It is the same truth that is expressed so beautifully in the above stanza.

The thought of the Precious Blood poured out so plenteously from the Sacred Heart for love of us lightens every sorrow, softens every pain, sweetens every cross in life and makes every earthly loss a gain; whilst the remembrance of the same Eucharistic Blood, the life of our soul, the burning fire of God's love, causes us to despise all earthly things, so that we may gain Christ. This is why those favored ones turn instinctively to the contemplation of Christ suffering for us and make the representation of His repeated Bloodsheddings so constantly a subject of their thoughts.

With these views in mind let us to-day reverently review those sacred Bloodsheddings of our Saviour that we too may bathe our souls in the sacred fount and become more and more purified and strengthened and may set our hearts on fire with the flames of holy love.

2. When Jesus was only eight days old, in the dawn of His career, He, at the Circumcision, commenced that shedding of the Precious

Blood which gave presage of the prodigality with which it should flow, when, some three and thirty years later, the shadows gathered in upon His mortal life and deepened into the pitchy darkness of Calvary. The long mysterious years of the Saviour's life in Nazareth must intervene before the second shedding of the Precious Blood.

With what ardor did He not yearn for the time when He should shed it all for love of us! As He desiringly repeats: "I have a baptism wherewith I am to be baptized: and how am I not straightened until it be accomplished."

It was God's redeeming love for us, as I have said, that brought our Saviour to the world. But, love, as the saints tell us, in this suffering and bleeding world, cannot be without suffering and sacrifice: and, hence, where true affection exists, something must be borne for the sake of the beloved one. "For love is strong as death."

Has the Redeemer given this supreme test of love? and what are the proofs of it that He has given to the world?

Ah, are we not at once reminded of the great and solemn tragedy that took place some nine-

teen hundred years ago without the walls of Jerusalem, wherein it seems to us we see again "the comeliest of the sons of men" dragged to execution by a furious rabble, who thirst for His blood, and clamor with fiendish malice and brutality: "Away with Him! away with Him!"

And as we pass in review those ever changing scenes that present themselves from the time that our Saviour leaves the Supper Chamber till the last word is spoken on the Cross, are we not made witnesses of the most sorrowful and heart-rending spectacle that was ever presented to human eye or mind?

And who is there that can contemplate unmoved that scene in the Garden of Gethsemani, where we behold the Saviour offer Himself formally as the Victim of atonement for us? In that scene He allowed Himself to be laden with such an excess of sorrow that He was constrained to put forth that plaintive cry: "My soul is sorrowful even unto death!" and, "O Father, if it may be; let this chalice pass away!" And in that bitterest of agonies the Precious Blood surges in the fountain of the Sacred Heart, till at last, with a mighty effort, it is pressed out at every pore of His Body,

drenches His garments, and falls in great drops to the ground. This is the fearful mystery of the second Bloodshedding.

3. The scene is changed; and as we transport ourselves in spirit to Pilate's hall, we behold standing around the Saviour a group of armed men. With harsh tones in their voice and fury in their looks, they scourge His shrinking form, while plaintive moans, intense, unbearable, escape His lips. The Sacred Blood is everywhere; on their accoutrements and hands. The pillars and pavement of that spacious hall are sodden with the crimson flow; while a thousand gaping wounds all over His mangled Body testify to the source whence it springs. It is the third shedding of the Blood of Jesus the all Beautiful.

4. Again the scene is changed. The Saviour is seen sitting on a low stool in the midst of the hall. His adorable face is soiled with spittle. A tattered purple cloak is thrown around His shoulders. A reed is in His hand, and on His head, a diadem, not of gold or precious stones, but of thorns, strong, sharp, and long, which pierce Him to the brain. The Sacred Blood trickles in a hundred streams down His brow and cheeks, and saturates His hair and beard.

It is the fourth great Bloodshedding of the Redeemer.

5. We must now leave behind us the city of Jerusalem, and join in a sad procession that is wending its weary way to the summit of Mount Calvary, to see our Saviour shedding His Precious Blood for the fifth time. Faint and exhausted with pain and loss of Blood, He toils wearily under the burden of His Cross. His footprints marked with Blood can be traced along the *dolorous way*. It is seen everywhere—on the hands and garments of the soldiers; on the napkin of Veronica; under the sandals of the passers-by. The places where He falls become so many pools of Blood. It is seen on every side. It is the fifth shedding of the Blood of the Redeemer of the world.

But not yet is there an end to the shedding of the Precious Blood of Jesus. Oh, no. It must yet be poured out in copious flow "for the washing of the sinner and the unclean from the fountains of the Saviour." And, behold, on Calvary, those four new fountains opened up in His hands and feet to pour out the copious stream for the gladding of the peoples; even as from the fountain-head created by God in the midst of Paradise, four rivers took their

rise to fertilize it and make it a place of beauty and delight. It was this sixth shedding of the Precious Blood that above all expiated our sins and brought about the Redemption of the world.

II

1. The Saviour hangs dead upon the Cross. The great victory over death and hell has been accomplished. His exhausted frame has at last succumbed to the exigencies of nature. His soul has winged its flight to Limbo, to comfort the saints of the Old Law held captive till that great day; when behold, the soldier couches his lance, and, with a mighty thrust, pierces the sacred side, and opens up the fountain of the Sacred Heart, from which issue, as the Apostle says, "water and Blood," the last few remaining drops. These form a tiny rill, and course down His sacred side, and oh, behold the mystery!

When Adam lay in mystic slumber in Paradise, God opened his side, took out his rib and from it formed the woman, Eve, to whom, when God introduced her as his wife, he, inspired, said: "This is now bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh; she shall be called

woman; because she was taken out of man; therefore, shall a man leave father and mother, and shall cleave to his wife; and they shall be two in one flesh."

And now, when Jesus hangs in His death slumber on the Cross, behold, His side is opened by the soldier's spear; and from His Sacred Blood He forms to Himself His spouse, the Church; fertilizes her; and makes her to be the mother of a progeny as numerous as the stars. To that mystic marriage St. Paul alludes, when he says that "we are bone of His bones and flesh of His flesh."

Of that sacred union we all are born to God. Hence, as the Apostle says: "See what charity the Father has for us, that we should be called, and should be, in reality, the children of God." "And if children," adjoins St. Paul, "why, heirs also, heirs of God, and co-heirs with Jesus Christ." And, therefore, concludes St. Peter, we are adopted into the family of the Godhead, "we are made sharers of the divine nature."

2. The drama of the many Bloodsheddings of the Saviour during His mortal life is ended. The human race is redeemed. But not yet is the shedding of that Sacred Blood come to an end. Nay, only since the Saviour's death is the full

impetuous torrent of the Precious Blood seen to flow in earnest. Henceforth day and night, in every land and clime, "from the rising of the sun to the going down of the same," "and even to the consummation of the world," the tiny tinkling of the Mass bell will be heard unceasingly proclaiming that the Precious Blood still continues to flow. For the Mass is not a mere representation of Calvary, or a vain memory of the death of Christ; it is the continuation of the Passion of the Saviour of the world. With God a thousand years are as a day, and in His eternal gaze the drama of the world's Redemption still goes on; and we, when we assist at Holy Mass, are privileged as were the Virgin Mother, and the holy women, and St. John, to be witnesses of the Saviour's death, for the Redemption of the world. Oh, what a thought! Do we realize the privilege that is ours, we who are so remiss in our devotion, who value so little attendance at Holy Mass, and who, when present, are so impatient at the time consumed, and allow our thoughts to be occupied with trifles concerning the world outside?

But even still, nay, more; as of old, there were seven distinct Bloodsheddings in the mor-

tal life of the Redeemer; so, too, in the life of His mystic spouse, the Church, His Precious Blood still flows in seven sacramental streams.

Truly, it is all so wonderful and awe-inspiring that we can only bow our heads in loving, silent adoration at the incomprehensible activity, and fruitfulness, and power of the Precious Blood, and whisper, in the silence of our heart: "My God, my ever loving Saviour, I reverence, and adore!"

SIXTH CONFERENCE

The Power of the Precious Blood

What is it, Lord, that strengthens
My soul at death's dread hour,
And gives the blest anointing
Such solace and such power?

What is it, Lord, that opens
The gates of Heaven to me,
Where I shall dwell in glory
And ever gaze on Thee?

"The Precious Blood I shed for thee
To be thy joy eternally."

I

1. In the sixteenth chapter of the Book of Leviticus it was ordered that the High Priest should enter into the Holy of Holies once a year, on the day of Expiation, and there offer incense and sprinkle the blood of victims towards the Oracle which represented the majesty of God.

Afterwards he was to pour the blood on the horns and round about the altar of holocausts, to sanctify it and in expiation of the sins of himself and his people. This ceremony was gone through every year during the whole period of the Jewish history, down to the coming of our Lord.

To this yearly purification of the Temple and the sanctuary St. Paul refers in the ninth chapter of his Epistle to the Hebrews, where he says that all this was a parable, the Holy Ghost signifying that the way into the true Holy of Holies, that is, into Heaven, was not yet made manifest while the former Temple was standing. And he goes on in this, one of the most striking passages in all Scripture: "But Christ being come, an High Priest of the good things to come, by a greater and more perfect tabernacle not made with hand, that is, not of this creation; neither by the blood of goats or calves, but by His own Blood entered once into the Holies, having obtained eternal redemption." "For," he continues, "if the blood of goats and oxen and the ashes of an heifer, being sprinkled, sanctify such as are defiled to the cleansing of the flesh; how much more shall not the blood of Christ, who by the Holy Ghost

offered Himself unspotted unto God, cleanse our consciences from dead works to serve the Living God? And therefore he is the mediator of the New Testament, that by means of His death, for the redemption of those transgressions that were under the former Testament, they that are called may receive the promise of eternal inheritance."

2. Here I wish to direct your attention to the particular point of this great exposition of Christian dogma. It is that the Apostle contrasts the priesthood of Jesus Christ with that of the children of Aaron. Their function was to make to God the oblation of weak offerings, the blood of goats and oxen; whereas, His was to make the oblation of His own Blood. Again, they had first of all to offer victims for their own sins before they could present themselves before God as mediators on behalf of their people; whereas He was Sanctity itself, the Son of the Eternal Father. Once again, the Holy of Holies entered by the priests of the Old Law was but a tent made of skins and embroidery, the work of craftsmen; whereas: the Holy of Holies into which Christ entered, "was not made with hand, that is, not of this creation," but Heaven itself, the home of God

to which He effected an entry by the power of His Blood.

And, lastly, the expiation accomplished by them was in regard to legal defects merely, infractions of the law of Moses, "justices of the flesh," as he calls them, and this expiation had to be repeated yearly; whereas the expiation effected by the Blood of Christ had the power "to cleanse our consciences from dead works," that is, mortal sins, so as "to serve the living God" with a pure and acceptable service, and to procure for us, not an annual, but "an eternal redemption."

"Therefore," he concludes, "He is the true mediator between man and an outraged God, who by means of his death, even for the Redemption of those transgressions that were under the former testament (he died for all), they that are called may receive the promise," may indulge the hope "of an eternal inheritance."

3. Now, you will observe that amid the multitude of clauses employed by the Apostle the one thing that is brought out with emphasis is the ineffable power of the Blood of Christ for the accomplishment of those wonders. By its shedding, namely, and that once,

He effected an entrance for men, not behind the frail curtain that separated the Holies from the Sanctuary, but into the closed and barred gates of Heaven, and thereby He obtained for His people not a yearly, "but an *eternal* redemption." He is the true Mediator, therefore, and He is so inasmuch as His Blood is the purchase price of the Redemption and the acceptable offering made to the Father in atonement for our sins.

II

1. Now it is of the power of the Precious Blood that I purpose speaking to you to-day, and I will do so in part by setting forth the arguments of the greatest of the Greek Fathers, as given in the lessons of the feast dedicated to this mystery.

St. John Chrysostom, the golden-tongued patriarch of Constantinople, who lived in the latter half of the fourth and the beginning of the fifth century, speaking of the Precious Blood in one of his great homilies says: "Do you wish to hear of the power of the Blood of Christ? Let us call to mind the virtues of its type as recorded in the pages of the Old Testament. It is there set forth that God threatened

the Egyptians that He would inflict on them the tenth plague, which was that in the middle of the night their first-born should perish, because they detained in slavery His first-born people, the Jews. But a fitting expedient must be found, lest His beloved people be destroyed together with them: for they all dwelt in the same place. Behold, then, a wonderful thing that shows us in truth its power. The instrument of the divine wrath was set in motion, and the destroying angel went around and visited all their homes. What, therefore, did Moses? 'Kill,' says he, 'a lamb a year old, and with its blood sprinkle the transoms and doorposts of your houses.' 'What do you say, Moses? Is the blood of a sheep able to preserve the lives of rational men?' 'Undoubtedly,' he replies; 'not because it is blood, but because by it is shown forth the power of the Blood of the Lord. For, even as the statues of the emperors, which are without life or speech, are wont at times to give relief to men gifted with a soul and reason, who fly to them for asylum, not because they are made of bronze, but because they bear the image of the princes; even so, this blood which was of an irrational animal, saved the lives of men, not because it was

blood, but because it pointed to the coming of the Blood of the Redeemer, and the destroying angel when he beheld the doorposts and approaches sprinkled passed them by and did not dare to enter. Now, therefore, if the enemy shall see, not the doorposts sprinkled with the blood of the type, but the resplendent Blood of the true Christ in the mouths of the faithful, consecrating the approaches of the temple (that, is, of man himself who is the temple of the Holy Ghost) how much more shall he betake himself away? for, if the angel gave way before the figure, how much more will not the enemy be terrified, if he behold the reality itself?' "

2. Do you wish to see another example of the power of the Blood? Well, then, see whence it first flowed, from what fountain it took its rise. It first came from the Cross. It had its origin in the side of Christ. For, "Jesus being dead," says the Evangelist, and still hanging on the Cross, "the soldier approached and opened his side with the spear, whence flowed water and blood."

"Whence flowed water and blood," the one, the symbol of Baptism: the other, of the Eucharist. Therefore, he did not say: "Whence

flowed blood and water," but, "whence flowed water first, and then blood," because we are first cleansed by Baptism and afterwards consecrated by the Holy Eucharist.

3. The soldier opened the side and disclosed the interior of the Holy Temple, and we have found there a treasure and can felicitate ourselves on having become the possessors of untold riches. Thus and with that Divine Lamb did it happen. The Jews killed the Lamb, and we have found store from the Mystery. "From the side—blood and water." I am unwilling, dearly Beloved, that you pass over the hidden sense of such a mystery, for there remains to me yet a mystic and mysterious word. I have said that the water and blood show forth the symbols of Baptism and the Eucharist, for from these Holy Church was built, by the regeneration of water and the Holy Ghost. By Baptism, I say, and the Eucharist, which are seen to have come forth from His side.

From His side, therefore, Christ founded His Church even as Eve came forth from the side of Adam. And for this reason St. Paul also testified recalling the inspired words of Adam: "We are members of his body, of his flesh, and of his bones," signifying, namely,

that side. For just as from the side of Adam God caused the woman to be formed; so, also, from His side Christ gave us water and blood, whence the Church should take her rise."

4. This power of the Blood of Christ is testified to further by the assembly of the saints, as is declared by Isaias in one of the noblest passages of Scripture. When warriors went into battle they were distinguished by the color of their armor and by other characteristic signs that made them known even in the midst of the *mêlée*. And this vesture they afterwards wore when returning in triumph from the field.

When Jesus entered into the great conflict of His Passion, the vesture He wore from Gethsemani to Calvary and the tomb was the royal vermillion of His own Blood, and this vesture He carried into Heaven on the day of His Ascension, to manifest it before the Father and His angels as the instrument of His triumph over death and hell, and to be forever the emblem of His glory and power. And so the Prophet would have the blessed spirits inquire with astonishment: "Who is he that cometh from Edom, with dyed garments from Bosra, this beautiful one in his robe marching with powerful strides in the greatness of his

strength?" Edom, the age-long enemy of the Jews, and Bosra, its strong city, are here taken in a mystical sense for the enemies of Christ and His Church. And Christ Himself, the Conqueror, "the Beautiful One in His robe," striding, that is, marching with strident steps, for such is the force of the word used by the Prophet, in the power of His saving Blood, replies: "I that speak justice, and am a Defender to save." "I the just and Holy One, the Saviour of my people."

"Why then is Thy apparel red and Thy garments like theirs that tread in the wine-press?" And He, forgetting the Blood dripping from His open wounds, and with the frenzy of battle still upon Him, replies: "I have trodden the wine-press alone, and of the nations," of all mankind, "there is not a man with Me," I alone am the Saviour of My people. "I have trampled on them," My enemies, death and hell, "in My indignation and have trodden them down in My wrath, and their blood is sprinkled on My garments, and I have stained all My apparel, for the day of vengeance is in My Heart, and the year of My Redemption is come."

This strong Blood that redeemed us Christ carries into Heaven to show forth for all time

the cost of His victory over death and hell, as the special mark of the glory achieved through His Sacred Humanity and the pledge with the Eternal Father of mercy on the Redeemed.

This, dearly Beloved, is the sacred object we venerate in the Devotion to the Precious Blood—the consecrated element first assumed from the pure heart of the ever blessed Virgin Mary, united to the Divine Word by the hypostatic union, to be by its outpouring in the Passion the price of our Redemption. The same Blood it is that, together with His Body, Christ gave us to be our food in the holy Sacrament of the Altar. The same is the Blood of Sacrifice that is ever poured out on the altar in atonement for our sins. The same Blood it is that cleanses us by its perpetual outpouring in the Sacraments of the Church and in conferring on us the grace of light and love to be our sweetness in the spiritual life, our strong hope in death, and the pledge of our union with God in the life to come.

SEVENTH CONFERENCE

The Blood of the Redemption

I

"Sitio,"—"I am thirsty."

1. This was the motto, the watchword, the lifelong yearning of one of the greatest women of modern times, one most favored by God, a woman of whom our country will one day be proud, when, as we firmly believe and trust, the aureola of sainthood will be placed upon her brow, and her name will be registered on the beadroll of the saints of the Catholic Church. This great woman was the venerable Mother Catherine Aurelia Caouette, foundress of the Institute of the Sisters Adorers of the Precious Blood, Daughters of Mary Immaculate, and reviver of the devotion amongst us.

And it expressed in the first place the yearning desire she felt of devoting herself and of being consumed in the promotion of the wor-

ship of the Precious Blood of our Lord Jesus Christ.

It formed in the second place, the text of those stirring appeals she made to her spiritual children, exhorting them to spend themselves in the veneration of the same divine object, and to propagate its worship everywhere.

But the words were not original. They were the response of this faithful soul to the pathetic cry of our Saviour on the Cross revealing the ineffable longing He felt for the salvation of men.

He had, to be sure, already poured out His Blood for us in torrents and with a generosity worthy of our God, in His agony in the Garden of Gethsemani, in the scourging, in the crowning with thorns, on the dolorous way to Calvary, and especially in the crucifixion, where, through the four fountains opened in His hands and feet, he washed away our sins. And now there remained in His Sacred Heart only a few drops wherewith to form His Spouse, the Church, and for which in a short time hence a passage should be opened through His side by the thrust of the soldier's spear. But His Heart was not satisfied, and He yearned still for a "Baptism" yet more copious,

wherewith to assuage His love; and, hence the cry of the "Man of Sorrows," mysterious as it is astonishing, and that reached even to the utmost heavens: *"Sitio"*—"I am thirsty still."

And we also, dearly beloved, should be filled with a sweet agony of thirst in response to that felt by our dying Saviour, and this thirst should be of a love urging us to spend our lives as the votaries of the Devotion of the Precious Blood and to make reparation to it for all the injuries and outrages it receives from sinners, especially in the most holy Sacrament of the Altar.

2. And now let me tell you what is *the Devotion of the Precious Blood.*

The Devotion of the Precious Blood consists, as the very title points out to us, in the worship of Jesus Christ shedding His Blood for us amid intense sufferings and with indescribable love that we might be made partakers of a superabundant spiritual life. Reciprocating His all-sacrificing love for us, we in turn consecrate all our actions and our whole being to His service. To this effect we labor earnestly to promote His glory; to advance in virtue, and to cultivate an intimacy with His Sacred Bloodshedding in the Passion and with the

outpouring of the Precious Blood in the sacramental life of the Church, especially in the Holy Mass and in the Sacrament of the Eucharist.

From this it will be seen that the devotion of the Precious Blood is threefold. Its aim is to stimulate us to love and glorify God more and more; to work with better success for the sanctification of our own soul; to labor with more zeal and power for the wants of the Church and for the spiritual well-being of souls both living and departed.

3. You ask, why pay special devotion to the Blood of our blessed Lord? I answer, first, for the very reason expressed in the question, namely, because it is the Blood of our God. For as I argued before, though it was assumed from the most pure blood of the Virgin Mary, and as such, is a created thing; yet, by reason of the hypostatic union of the Sacred Humanity with the Godhead in Jesus Christ, it is made divine, and, therefore, worthy of divine worship.

But there is more, and the Precious Blood has earned for itself our everlasting veneration and gratitude, in as much as it and it alone is the purchase price of our Redemption. This

gives it an inconceivable value in our regard, and compels our love and gratitude. For from all eternity it had been laid out by God that the sufferings, the crucifixion, and the shedding of the Blood of His only Son, should be the means His providence designed for the redemption of mankind.

O my dearly beloved, reflect deeply on all that is contained in that great mystery. It is to the shedding of the Blood of our Lord on Calvary that we are indebted for the Redemption from our sins. It was the sacred Blood-shedding of Jesus Christ on the Cross that rescued us from slavery to the devil, and opened to us the gates of Heaven. It is the constant pleading of the Precious Blood before the throne of mercy that makes the Eternal Father propitious to us. It is through the effusion of the same Sacred Blood in the Sacraments and through the mystic operation of the Church that our souls are cleansed and sanctified. For, if, as St. Paul says, under the old dispensation "the blood of goats and oxen and the ashes of a heifer, being sprinkled, sanctified such as were defiled to the cleansing of the flesh: how much more shall the Blood of Christ who by the Holy Ghost offered Himself un-

spotted unto God cleanse our consciences from dead works to serve the living God?"

4. There is another devotion and mystery in the Church, beautiful and admirable beyond all that can be told, with which the devotion and the mystery of the Precious Blood has intimate relation—I mean the mystery and devotion of the Immaculate Conception. For it was in order that the Redeeming Blood of the Saviour might spring from a pure and undefiled source, that the Almighty willed the mystery. The Immaculate Conception is then the oldest and greatest triumph of the Redemption. Thus, it is the highest and oldest work of the Precious Blood, and, as has been said by a devout writer, "There is between the two mysteries a sweet circle of cause and effect —now the cause is the effect, and now the effect is the cause. For in the Immaculate Conception which was its choicest work, the Precious Blood first took its origin. The Immaculate Conception was for the sake of the Precious Blood. It was for the ensuring of its purity and the protection of its honor. The Precious Blood, from the subterranean uprisings of its fiery love, raised up the mountains of the Immaculate Conception, ('her

foundations were laid on the holy mountains') and then flowed down from the summits as a sweet, fountain for the gladdening of the nations. The Immaculate Conception is, therefore, part of the devotion of the Precious Blood. It is creation's richest offering made by the Queen of Creation, who thus in the jubilee of her sinless dawn, crowned the Precious Blood by being crowned herself with its choicest crown." *

5. Let me go on to say that the Blood of Jesus Christ, assumed as drink in Holy Communion, is the life of our souls. It was said in the law that "the blood is the life." And truly it is this vital fluid carried through the veins and arteries that conveys life and healing to the body and gives robustness to the limbs; and the body drained of its blood is but a carcass and a lifeless thing. For this reason, and also because it was a figure of the Blood of the Redemption to be shed on Calvary, it was not permitted to the Jews to eat the blood of animals, whether they were victims slain in sacrifice or whether they were slaughtered for domestic use.

And so also of the Blood of Jesus Christ

* Father Faber.

assumed in Holy Communion. It conveys supernatural life and healing to the soul, and is an earnest of eternal life to come. For this we have no less an authority than Christ himself. For speaking to the Jews He said: "Amen, amen I say to you, unless you drink of the blood of the Son of Man, you shall not have life in you."

Yes, it is the ruby stream of life sparkling in the heart and arteries of our God-Saviour and received in Holy Communion that carries divine healing and strength to our diseased and languishing souls, and that instills into them the germs of immortal life. And hence He continues: "He that drinketh my blood abideth in me and I in him; and I will raise him up on the last day." "Your fathers did eat manna in the desert, but the manna being corruptible food, they died. On the contrary, he that drinketh of this food, which is my blood, and the fruit of me, the tree of life, shall not see death, but shall have life everlasting."

The blood of Jesus assumed in Holy Communion is thus the "wine germinating virgins," that is to say, men and women of supernatural tastes who live a life detached from the gratification of the senses, who hunger and

thirst after justice, and who, while still in the corruptible flesh, live the life of angels.

II

1. The primary object of the Devotion of the Precious Blood is then the Blood that flows through the Heart and arteries of Jesus Christ; whether we consider Him as still living His mortal life on earth, or, in His sacramental life on our altars, or, as poured out on our souls to sanctify them through the vivifying action of the Church, or, finally, in Heaven, where it pleads powerfully for us before the Eternal Father.

But the ultimate and adequate object of the devotion is none other than the worship of the Sacred Person of Jesus Christ Himself, the Redeemer of the world. This is brought home to us strikingly among other ways in the liturgy of the Church, that perennial song of love and worship offered by the spouse to her Beloved. Thus, for instance, in that sublime prayer with which the Office of the feast commences, it opens with the stirring words: "Come, let us adore Christ, the Son of God, who has redeemed us with His Blood," and again in the canticle of the "Te Deum": "We beseech Thee,

O Lord, help Thy servants, whom Thou hast redeemed with Thy Precious Blood." And this makes known to us how all-embracing is the worship that is proposed to us in this devotion. Let me say in a word that there is nothing more comprehensive in religion itself, and it embraces entire Christianity. Jesus Christ shedding His Blood for the Redemption of mankind—this is the soul of Christian worship, the center of the whole religious system. Hence St. Paul sums up the mission of himself and his fellow-apostles in the one sentence: "We preach Jesus Christ and Him crucified, to the Jews a stumbling block and to the Gentiles foolishness, but to those that believe, whether Jews or Greeks, the power of God, and the wisdom of God."

2. The Devotion of the Precious Blood opens up to us once again the grand spectacle of the "Marriage of the Lamb" with His spouse the Church, amid the sublime ritual of the Passion. And even as in Paradise God impressed a mysterious sleep upon the founder of our race, and while thus disposed, took out one of his ribs and from it formed life, and the mother of all the living; so, on Calvary, as the Evangelist declares, while the Saviour lies in

the mystic slumber of death, His side is opened with the soldier's spear, and from it flows His sacred Blood, the last few ebbing drops of His life-stream, with which He forms His spouse the Church, fertilizes her, and makes her the mother of all the saved. To that mystic union of Christ with His Church we all owe the life of our souls, are made the children of God and heirs of Heaven. With that sacred creation of His Godhead He unites Himself by the most irrevocable of ties. Hence, He could say to her, our Mother, in the inspired words of scripture: "Thou art bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh." Thou shalt hereafter be called the spouse of God.

3. This being so, is it any wonder that the Devotion of the Precious Blood should be so all-comprehending in its scope, and that it should join on to and share in the merits of all the other great devotions that have for their object attributes belonging to the Incarnate Word? If, then, we have devotion to the Sacred Heart, that same Heart is the chalice from which was poured out the saving Blood that redeemed the world. If we have devotion to the five wounds, it is because they were the fountains opened in the body of the Saviour

"for the washing of the sinner and the unclean." If we venerate the different instruments of the Passion, it is because they were consecrated by the outpouring on them of the Precious Blood. If we have devotion to the mystery of the Eucharist, it is because it is the Sacrament of the Blood that has made our life. If we venerate the Holy Mass, it is because it is the continuation of the sacrificial Blood-shedding that redeemed the world. The Sacraments of the Church, what are they but the channels conveying to our souls the fertilizing Blood of the Saviour that they may bring forth a plenteous harvest of virtue and merit. Thus it is that the sacred Blood percolates throughout the whole life of the Church, and is the great sanctifying agency which gives life and healing power to all its actions. See then, that you take up this great devotion here offered to you, and make it the leading inspiration of your lives.

Oh, may God enflame all our hearts with a burning desire to honor and glorify the Precious Blood of Jesus Christ shed for our redemption on Calvary, and now present to be the life of our soul in the Sacrament of the Altar! And may the influence of this blessed

devotion spread to the ends of the earth to be to all souls the source of their happiness and merit and the pledge of their felicity to come!

Act of Consecration

And now, dearly beloved, I invite all you who have followed me by the perusal of those pages, to kneel down and consecrate yourselves as humble votaries of the Precious Blood and say: "O my Lord Jesus Christ, I adore Thee. I thank Thee for all Thy past favors to me. I thank Thee especially for redeeming me at the cost of Thy Precious Blood, poured out for me on Calvary and now given me to be the life of my soul in the Most Holy Sacrament of the Altar. I this day consecrate myself to Thee, and promise to devote myself all my life as Thy loving child to the veneration and love of the same Sacred Blood; to make reparation for all the injuries it receives from sinners, and to use all my endeavors to make its virtues known to all people.

"Grant, O Divine Saviour, through its life-giving virtues, that I may lead a holy life, grow in grace, and die in Thy love, that so it may be to me a pledge of life with Thee in heaven. Amen."

INDEX

Abraham, 22, 65
Active Recollections, Prayer of, 240
Acts of the Apostles, 317
Affective Prayer, 135, 143, 233
Albert the Great, 217
Apocalypse, 120
Assumption, 300
Attention at Prayer, 22
Augustine, St., 5, 105, 225, 274

Babylon, 97
Baptist, St. John, 17, 207
Benedict, St., 207
Bernard, St., 111, 150, 293, 294
Bethlehem, 84
Blessed Virgin, Devotion to, 292
Bonaventure, St., 111
Bosra, 259
Bossuet, 159
Bridget, St., 301
Burning Bush, 93

Canticle, 133
Carmel, Mount, 17
Catherine Aurelia of the Precious Blood, 361
Catherine of Siena, St., 289
Celestial Water, 245, 246, 250
Chrysostom, St. John, 40, 254
Church, 46, 47
Colossians, Ep. to, 98
Communion, 279, 282
Communion, Spiritual, 289, 290
Conditions of Prayer, 12, 18, 20, 21
Confession, 269
Confidence in Prayer, 20
Contemplation, 189, 190, 198, 201
Contentments, 238
Creation, 30
Cyprian, St., 21

David, 95, 96, 129, 174
Degrees of Prayer, 228, 229, 236, 253
Denis, St., 190, 193, 198
Desert, 17
Devotion, 21
Discursive Prayer, 230
Divine Office, 93, 94, 100, 103, 106
Dominic, St., 92, 111
Dominican School, 127

Ecclesiasticus, 14, 15
Edom, 359
Elias, 207
Ephesians, 9
Espousals, Spiritual, 251
Esdras, 207
Exodus, Book of, 93, 95
Ezechiel, 325

Faber, Father, 367

Fabian, Pope, 287
"Father, Our," 16, 26, 29, 32, 34, 37, 45, 54, 59, 63, 70
Francis de Sales, St., 120, 159

Gertrude, St., 298, 300
Gregory the Great, St., 206, 224, 275
Gregory of Nyssa, St., 7

Hebrides, 208
Holy Ghost, 305, 312, 319, 323
Honorius of St. Mary, 166
Horeb, 17
Humility, 18
Hypocrates, 27

Ignatius, St., 119
Immaculate conception, 366, 367
Infused Contemplation, 236
Innocent III, Pope, 287
Interior Castle, 226, 237, 259
Ireland, 208
Isaias, 28

James, St., 21, 28
Jeremias, 207
Jerome, St., 17, 207
John, St., 37, 313
John of the Cross, St., 121

Kingdom, 46, 47, 49

Latteran, Fourth C. of, 287
Leo XIII, Pope, 288
Leviticus, Book of, 350
Liguori, St., 6
Luke, St., 286

Magdalen, St. Mary, 207
Mary full of Grace, 77
Mansions, Interior, 230, 247
Marriage, Spiritual, 256
Massoulié, Father, 163
Matthew, St., 15, 55
Meditation, 113, 124
Mental Prayer, 108, 113, 117, 205
Mercier, Cardinal, 120
Moses, 93, 94, 103
Mother of God, 77
Mysteries of the Rosary, 80, 81, 82, 85
Mystic Life, 258

Nazareth, 84

Osee, 17

Paradise, 49
Passion, 208
Passive Recollection, 243
Paul, St., 9, 57, 105, 128, 225, 347, 351
Peter Damian, St., 299
Perseverance, 24
Pharisee, 19
Philip Neri, St. 299
Piny, Father, 171, 174, 179
Pius X, Pope, 288
Prayer, 1, 2, 12, 18
Prayer of Quietude, 213, 245
Prayer of Recollection, 153, 163, 168, 181, 236, 245
Prayer of Union, 217
Prayer, Vocal, 108
Precious Blood, 328, 340, 346, 350, 361
Presence of God, 128
Psalmist, 9, 10

Publican, 19

Rapture, 252
Red Sea, 95
Rigoleue, Father, 161
Rosary, 72, 73, 79, 80, 87, 89, 90, 119, 300

Scaramelli, Father, S. T., 272, 299
Self-denial, 208
Sisters Adorers of the Pr. Blood, 361
Sister Mary John Berchimaus, 305
Solomon, 7
Tastes, divine, 238, 240, 241
Temptation, 64, 65, 68
Teresa, St., 122, 127, 132, 159, 168, 181, 219, 226, 230, 233, 265
Thabor, 6
Thebaid, 17
Theft of the Spirit, 252
Thomas, St., 2, 111, 115, 150, 176, 190, 195, 210, 279, 281, 287
Trent, Council of, 5

Wisdom, Book of, 199
Way of Perfection, 237, 264

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